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ABSTRACT

Sharing concerns and interests of New York State educators in the improvement of literacy, this annual journal raises educational issues such as: empowering students' voices; responding to the call for higher standards by instructing and including all learners; using the Internet to promote literacy; and poetry as a powerful genre. Articles in the journal also present literacy research conducted using a variety of approaches, descriptions of college-community partnerships, and recommendations of multicultural books and favorite stories. Articles in the journal are "Conversations in the Margins: Reading Literature as a Democratic Process" (Gordon M. Pradl); "Participating in Student-Led Book Clubs: The Case of Jennifer" (Virginia J. Goatley and Jeanne Marie Levine); "Meeting the Challenge of Tougher Literacy Standards" (Sean A. Walmsley); "Performance Assessment and the English Language Arts Standards" (Peter Johnston); "Retention and Promotional Gates: Expensive and Ineffective Ideas Make a Comeback" (Richard Allington); "Children Betrayed" (Walter E. Sawyer and Jean C. Sawyer); "Promoting Literacy on the Internet: A Model Classroom Activity" (Dennis G. Mike); "'Poetry Is a Gift You Get and Never Out Grow': Sixth Graders Discovering Poetry" (Barbara Combs and others); "Comparing Story Reading and Textbook Reading: Middle-Level Readers' Understanding of Text" (Margaret Morgan); "What's a Researcher, Anyway?" (Ellen Adams); "Thoughts on Affirming Young Children's Literacy Efforts" (Mary Shea); "Learning to Read: The Miracle of Language" (Elizabeth Stever); "Project HOPE: A Collaborative Literacy Effort for Urban Youth" (Mary Rearick); "The Culture of Families and the Building of School-Home Connections" (Sema Brainin); "School-Based Practicum in Reading Disabilities" (Laura Klenk and Janice F. Almasi); "The Literacy Focused School: A University-School Collaboration Project" (Carol G. Hittleman); "Constructing Bridges to Literacy through Multiethnic Literature for Children" (Violet H. Harada); and "Something Old, Something New: Children's Literature Favorites" (New York State Reading Association Literature Committee). Individual articles contain references. (RS)

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THE NEW YORK STATE READING ASSOCIATION

The Language and Literacy Spectrum

Volume 7 Spring 1997

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INFORMATION

The **New York State Reading Association** is a statewide organization made up of 43 local reading councils having a total membership of over 6,500 educators from across the state. The goal of **NYSRA** and the local councils is to promote literacy and general improvement of reading at all levels, and to encourage reading as a lifetime activity. All members of **NYSRA** receive a subscription as part of their membership fees.

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The Language and Literacy Spectrum is a publication of the New York State Reading Association. It is published annually and intended for a wide professional audience including classroom teachers, reading and special educators, consultants, college and university faculty, parents and administrators of schools as well as others interested in literacy and the language arts.

The Spectrum welcomes manuscripts about literacy and language topics, ideas and events of interest at all levels of education. Only original manuscripts will be considered for publication. The Spectrum welcomes photographs depicting students in varied literacy activities. Black and white photographs are preferred. Parent/guardian permission must be obtained in writing, and the photographs are not returned. The deadline for submitting manuscripts is December 1st of each year. Manuscripts and editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

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1. Varied manuscript formats are welcome. The journal accepts manuscripts related to reading and the language arts at all levels of interest. Articles by teachers as active researchers are encouraged. Technical articles and research reports are encouraged but must be written in a style suitable for the general readership of **The Spectrum.**

2. **The Language and Literacy Spectrum** is a refereed journal and, therefore, manuscript review is blind. Contributors must submit three copies of each manuscript. Author(s) and affiliation(s) should be identified in cover letter only. Manuscripts must be prepared according to the style of the American Psychological Association. If a paper is accepted for publication, authors must submit a 3.5 floppy disk of the manuscript in WordPerfect format, for either Macintosh or IBM compatible computer.

3. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of material in their article and the opinions and conclusions expressed therein. All manuscripts accepted in **The Spectrum** must be original and not being considered for publication elsewhere.

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On the cover of this journal: Germaine Vega Soto responds artistically to *Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom* in the Sage Literacy Program. Photograph courtesy of Robin Evans.

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From the Editors

The seventh issue of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* contains several sections: Articles: Literacy Research; College-Community Partnerships, Perspectives, Children's Literature. The Articles generally focus on four themes: (1) empowering students' voices; (2) responding to the call for higher standards by instructing and including all learners; (3) using the Internet to promote literacy; (4) poetry as a powerful genre. Literacy Research includes a variety approaches including experimental, ethnographic, case study, and teacher-researcher pieces. College-Community Partnerships describe a variety of educational collaborations from tutorial programs to inservice/preservice efforts. The Perspectives section includes two reviews of *Text, Lies and Video Tape: Stories About Life, Literacy and Learning*, providing a point/counterpoint discussion of this book. Multicultural books and favorite stories are recommended in Children's Literature.

The publishing of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* could not have been possible without the support of others. Steck-Vaughn/Berrent assumed the majority of the costs of producing of the journal. On behalf of NYSRA, we acknowledge their generous financial contribution. As in past years, The Sage Colleges continue their general support of the publication of the journal in many daily ways including some postage, fax, and phone costs. The Colleges' on-going commitment to the journal is appreciated.

The publication of the seventh issue of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* completes our term as Editors. It has been much, much more work than we ever envisioned and, concomitantly, much, much more rewarding than we ever imagined. It was our initial hope that the journal might serve as a forum for thought-provoking literacy discussions with each member of NYSRA receiving a copy. We look back with a sense of accomplishment because the journal has grown in stature and distribution. We exceeded beyond our wildest dreams! Today we have nationally-known researchers and master teachers sharing their expertise on timely literacy issues. We did not accomplish our goal without the help of many talented and generous-spirited people.

To our professional colleagues across the State – we thank you for your support through submissions of manuscripts. Now you can relax when you see us. No longer will we greet you with, "When can we expect an article for *The Language and Literacy Spectrum*?" or "Help! We need an expedited review of this manuscript."

To the Editorial Review Board – we thank you for your legions of hard work reviewing manuscripts. If you think you worked harder this year, you are correct because the number of submissions doubled, while the Board remained the same size. Your efforts were greatly appreciated, and we were impressed with the thoroughness of your reviews. Thank you again and again!

To Wallace Freeland, President of NYSRA – thank you, Wally, for help in so many ways. Wally has been a strong advocate for *The Language and Literacy Spectrum*, much in the vein of Past Presidents' Jane Barber-Smith, Paula Costello, and Marilyn Funes. We count ourselves fortunate to have worked with these four Association Presidents, are pleased to call them professional friends, and offer a sincere thank you for their support and efforts.

We continue to be grateful to the NYSRA Executive Board for their continued vision in supporting a state-wide professional journal. Thank you to one and all. Your literacy leadership is necessary in these challenging and complicated educational times. Thank you for entrusting the journal to us. We appreciate your belief in our competence.

We thank the New York State Reading Association for the opportunity to serve as Editors of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum*. We have tried to fulfill our obligations by yearly producing a quality publication that reflects the spirit of literacy instruction in New York State. We hope we have contributed to a sharing of literacy knowledge in our State (and beyond).

Lastly, we pleased to entrust the journal to the new Editor: Dr. Janice F. Almasi at the University at Buffalo. We know that the journal is in very capable hands. As we relinquish the editorship, we send all our best wishes for the continued success of *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* under your stewardship.

KAG & PCMcD
January 15, 1997
The Sage Colleges
Education Department
Troy, NY 12180

Conversation in the Margins: Reading Literature as a Democratic Process

Gordon M. Pradl

ABSTRACT

In working with our students in the area of literature, it is helpful to take into account the democratic aspects of the strategies and relationships we establish in our classrooms. After considering the importance of reader response and how time affects our reading processes, a teacher-less "written conversation" among four adults, who are reading a poem for the first time, provides one illustration of how the social reading of literature might enact a democratic exchange of views that furthers the understanding and commitment of individual readers.

Desiree and Donald, Deana and Darryl, are fidgeting and silent at the back of the room. The large-group discussion of *Bridge to Terabithia* going nowhere. Individually, the students had appeared enthusiastic to the teacher while they were reading Katherine Paterson's (1977) novel. As Jess came to terms with Leslie's drowning, readers had been visibly moved, and the teacher overheard several brief conversations about the power of the friendship the two characters had developed. Yet, when it came time to talk formally in class, most of the students sat still, waiting for clues from the teacher about what to say. How often all of us as teachers have struggled with similar unanimated situations. Students clearly involved with a text, but no meaningful forum where they might speak.

What if we look at this problem from the perspective of relationships? We might find that students frequently remain disconnected from each other in such large group discussions because they sense they should be acting according to some script not their own. And while they may want to be compliant, at best they can only participate as outsiders. In short, what's at issue here, is the set of social values we end up modeling for our students. What room do we provide for students to try out their reading-responses democratically? Indeed, how might we see our literature classroom as an important site for experiencing democratic attitudes and processes? While teachers are bound to disagree about what finally constitutes democratic teaching practice – and also whether such practice actually interferes with the "basics" of what students need to learn about literature – there has been a growing interest among teachers in using a democratic perspective to reflect on the teaching and learning conversations we encourage in our classrooms.

But what is a democratic perspective? What consensus is there when we talk about democratic attitudes and processes? When applied to the classroom, the term democratic clearly refers to something other than popular elections and representative government. In our society, what seems to motivate much of our thinking about democracy is our supreme valuing of the individual person. Yet, inevitably, persons belong to social groups. Thus the continuing challenge facing any democracy is how citizens retain their individual freedom while working productively with others in situations where some of this freedom must be surrendered.

In working through disagreements, concessions matter, both big and small. Thus it is not surprising that democratic discourse rests on people cooperating, and the spirit that guides them is an agreement "to meet their differences openly, and that requires them each to rethink continually their own intentions and actions in terms of those of differing others" (Clark, 1994, p. 73). The democratic triumph, in other words, is how ways are found to negotiate and honor difference. In claiming our various group identities, we need to understand that in a democracy we have a responsibility to remain open to the competing claims of worlds opposing our own.

Our common belief in social democracy remains grounded in tolerance, reason, and persuasion, rather than the mere exertion of brute force. So it is this attitude toward ideas, both our own and those of others, that interests us as teachers when we consider democratic practices in our classrooms. We may not be in the classroom to vote on anything whether it be books, assignments, or student grades; we are, however, involved in either fostering or neglecting any number of values that may help create a democratic disposition among our students. We will, of course, have much to tell our students about the texts we read together. If we value democracy, however, we will also be searching for ways to encourage our students' confidence in their own responses and ideas, even as we insist these responses and ideas be tested and expanded by those of others. Evidence and persuasion count, not position and power. In trying to honor multiple perspectives, we see that a course of continual reflection and criticism – of negotiation and compromise – must be rooted in individual voices, both the teacher's and the students."

...Social democracy remains grounded in tolerance, reason, and persuasion...

In this article, I briefly outline two developments that have encouraged me to consider the democratic aspects of my work with students, however imperfect may be the results. The first development entails the recent focus on how readers actually go about reading. Now that we acknowledge the central role played by the engaging minds of individual students in the act of reading, as teachers we have responsibility for initiating classroom prompts and relationships that will serve as a necessary medium for promoting open-ended discussions about literature. The second development recognizes that our lives and ideas are constantly evolving, which means our interpretations of literary works are also subject to the transformations of time. A story we failed to appreciate on the first reading may take on a positive coloring as we learn more or later talk to a reader who gets us to see the story in a new light. For a confident reader displays flexibility, laying out predictions and conclusions and then allowing evidence and time to work their possible revisions. This temporal quality of our experience is what undergirds the values of openness, permeability, and change – each being necessary for sustaining the fragile democratic arrangements in our culture. For when people are closed, intractable, and rigid, when they lack empathy, it is difficult to practice the tolerance and compromise our pluralistic society requires.

After considering how these two strands, reader response and time, underscore the importance of democratic conversation in the literature classroom, I report on one such conversation that occurred when I asked four graduate students to share their responses to a poem by writing with each other instead of talking. In contrast to speech, which continually disappears behind itself, a written conversation has the immediate virtue of leaving behind a record of thought that might be recursively challenged and extended, while democratically leaving space open for the responses of all participants. Finally, I end by commenting on the central role of face-to-face student encounters in encouraging forms of democratic exchange in the literature classroom.

The Influence of Reader Response and Time on Democratic Reading Practices

The unpredictable reader has been with us since the invention of writing, and so Reader-response criticism is not just a phenomenon of the last quarter century. For instance, any account of reading as an individual act of construction could hardly leave out Plato's complaints in *Phaedrus*. Though not a democrat, Plato realized that, once ideas were set down in writing, the intended meanings were potentially weakened once the author was no longer available to explain or defend himself. Accordingly, through the ages, reading practices (such as protestants insisting that no priest was going to interpret holy scripture for them) have frequently threatened existing hierarchies, which in turn are always seeking to keep readers under control. In this sense a history of reading corresponds to the gradual spread of a democratic ethos with its emphasis on each person's agency and individual worth.

At the beginning of the modern era, more than one hundred years ago, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) reflected on the complicated process of making meaning out of a work of literature, pointing to the indeterminate transactions carried out between a writer, who initially creates the text, and a reader, who in turn brings it alive again:

> Why not photograph, so to speak, the contents of the mind of the Writer on to the mind of the Reader? Simply because the mind of the Reader is not a blank, inert plate, but a living crowd of thoughts and feelings, which are existing on their own account and in a manner wholly different from that other living crowd of thoughts and feelings, the mind of the Writer. (Lee, 1927, p. 64)

In a similar vein, Louise Rosenblatt declared unequivocally in 1938:

> There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are in reality only the potential millions of individual readers of the potential millions of individual literary works. The novel or poem or play exists, after all, only in interactions with specific minds. (p. 22)

In a democratic literature classroom – regardless of the form it finally takes – teachers realize that individual readers must finally read for themselves. This truth may seem inescapable, but often our routines, our own readings, can get in the way. So we struggle to understand how the conversations in our classes either detract from or support the growing power and confidence of readers. And while we value the process of individual readers reading, we search for ways of keeping these readings connected to the readings of others. Just discovering the uniqueness of how readers construct meaning does not lead necessarily to any program for developing a student's competence as a reader. For knowing more about readers' processes can also be an excuse for the teacher to intrude or disrupt in ways that try to enforce a "right response."

Acknowledging the central role of the student/reader encourages teachers to examine how the distribution of authority in the classroom contributes to the reading process. Often we find students searching for the "correct answer" as they try to play the classroom game successfully; yet, when this happens, they relinquish whatever autonomy they have as readers. Aware of this all too typical dynamic in education, the teacher in a democratic classroom is continually raising the question as to whose authority counts in making meaning of the text. The author's? The teacher's? The student's? Who gets the first word, and the last?

As scholars debate how far a reader's interpretation might legitimately be allowed to wander, it seems that again we are struggling with the common fear of unpredictability and uncertainty, especially when we are facing the difficulty of working with unsophisticated readers. Letting students interpret texts on their own is a threatening prospect, especially when it risks calling into question some of the teacher's unexamined prejudices. Indeed, in their analysis of student readings, Norman Holland (1975) and David Bleich (1975) have seemed to invite student responses that appear completely self-centered. Yet if each person's readings are merely idiosyncratic, where will it be possible for social conversation to begin? And then whose values will convene and dominate the class? At this point, however, we as teachers need to assert our faith in a democratic sensibility. Authority from this perspective is about sharing and balance. In this way we choose to be open both to criticism and to change, for we are aware that individual freedom consists in no belief or interpretation being totally ascendant.

Democracy finally is a social system of values and relationships that mediates the natural tensions existing between the individual and the group. Daniel wants Durk and Diana to join him as he builds a house with blocks, but then he wants to push them away once they add some structural combinations and ideas of their own. Or in choosing a class story to read, David becomes angry when the class doesn't pick one he likes. Student interests are seldom neatly aligned, and often students want group membership to be defined on their own terms. Yet, despite these ongoing outbursts of egocentricity, the teacher recognizes that student self-expression is finally what serves as the foundation of social dialogue and advancement. Under the influence of democratic processes of discussion, the notion of some absolute and final response is replaced with the sense that, as we share them, our responses gradually improve. Indeed, the fact that readers can actually communicate their "idiosyncratic" meanings inevitably reminds us that we share a common language, one which makes society possible. Because we do not wish to be excluded from the company of others, we revise the responses and interpretations we articulate so that generally they might be comprehended by our audience. For democratic conversations to prosper, our words need not depend on conditions of absolute objectivity. Instead, as we imagine each other's possible worlds, our exchanges become reciprocally reinforcing. This sense of critical and imaginative pluralism is precisely the spirit animating the understandings of Lee and Rosenblatt. For while they welcomed the individual reader's opportunity to extend a text's meaning beyond any fixed intention of the author, they simultaneously recognized the social conventions of language and culture concretely realized in any text.

...Student self-expression is finally what serves as the foundation of social dialogue and advancement.

Democracy stirs up obligations of fairness and balance. It would be naive, however, to expect that our goals of equity and justice will ever be reached, either in society or the classroom. Still, reader-response criticism invites us to explore collaboratively with our students the tension between reader and writer. From the reader's perspective, the person doing the reading is a "self" in contact with an author who serves as a functioning "other" to be incorporated as part of the set of social relationships that readers come to internalize in their minds. In complementary fashion, when the author is looking outward toward the audience, wondering how his or her words will be interpreted, the reader becomes the "other." It is this intimate and endless reciprocity between the roles of reader and author that lies at the heart of democratic reading. The democratic problem, in other words, is how we handle difference. In claiming our various identities as author, reader, teacher, or student, we need to understand that in a democracy the group aspect of our identity involves a responsibility to remaining open to the competing claims of other ideas and beliefs, other possible worlds different from the one we now inhabit.

The challenge in conceptualizing reading is to avoid dichotomizing the "entities" of *author* and *reader, teacher* and *student*. Because reading is a conventional, social act, it follows that as individual readers we are always in fact social readers in two senses: first, we begin with a *prior* sense of the activity – we read with certain expectations and are guided by certain conventions that are learned and revised through our social encounters; second, during the actual *process* of reading, which includes self-reflection, we experience a natural desire to compare and negotiate our meanings with others. Just as no set pattern explains how an individual makes meaning, there is no formula for the way readers come to negotiate their readings with others.

Works of literature can develop our capacities to stay in touch with interpretive lenses that contest our own. These contests involve competing answers to the ongoing ethical dilemmas that surprise us just as we settle into certainty. Without a conversational process to keep us in contact with the ideas of the opposition over time, our readings become rigid, constrained. By encouraging a democratic attitude toward the ways we talk with others about our continually emerging and evolving readings, the literature classroom can provide an important opportunity for students to learn to live with complexity, with contradictory motives and allegiances.

As Rosenblatt tells us, "the poem" is best "thought of as an event in time" (1978, p. 12). While it may appear to be happening all at once, reading, and our talk about it, *exists in time*. First, there is the time it takes to actually complete a reading (We may be days, for instance, consuming a novel, even as it consumes us.) This is why teachers have found reading response journals so useful in getting students to appreciate the irregularities of their readings of longer works. One's expectations and satisfactions change over the course of a long read, and a record of this journey cautions us against making any neat summarizing statements after we have finished reading a text. Second, after the initial reading, there is the longer span of time during which we may be reconsidering our original response and interpretation. As the circumstances of our knowledge or experience change, so might the way we view or value a text, and being forced to account for our conflicting readings can make us more tolerant of perspectives not our own. When we keep *time* in mind as readers, Steven Mailloux's (1982) warning appears particularly salient: "By neglecting . . . the temporal reading process . . . traditional holistic criticism not only distorts the actual effects literature produces; it also omits an important part of the author's intention and artistic technique" (p. 71). Ignoring time, which impresses on us the endless variability of our current positions, we fail to exploit one of the central tenets underlying our democratic arrangements. For democracy is the only social system that depends on people openly acknowledging their fallibility. Therein lies the hope that equity and justice – revised and improved "readings" – might continue to grow out of the errors that time makes manifest.

How a reader actually makes sense and significance of the words as her eyes glide down the page is one starting point for democratic talk about literary texts. Prior to this act of reading, however, lie a vast array of conventions that a reader must command if any text is to be accessible. But this background knowledge (e.g., automobiles didn't exist in 1776, not all poems have to rhyme, the wild things can be scary, Jack London joined the gold rush to the Klondike in 1897) exists dialectically like reading itself, despite the fact that often I can end up putting off student readers by drowning them in information before the book is even opened. Instead, a reader's mastery of the conventions of reading seems to develop best when he or she is engaged in continuing conversations with texts and more experienced readers. Denise and Dmitri, for instance, never seem to get tired of pulling the letters out of *The Jolly Postman* (1986), perhaps because what is cleverly being communicated in each letter allows them to imagine familiar characters actually engaging in a world filled with everyday situations and conventions. As beginning readers, Denise and Dmitri have a starting point of information, which is then expanded as they talk with their older friend

Dennis about these stories within stories. But such learning would be blocked in grouping situations where everyone is at the same level. Thus, from a democratic perspective, ability tracking restricts student reading development because it disrupts the natural rhythms of social reading that occur across interest and knowledge levels.

Through a mixing of readers, difference becomes an important shaping force, not something to be dismissed or used to enforce some existing advantage. Through talk students can learn to open for scrutiny the process of their readings, as they democratically push and challenge each other in a respectful manner. Yet in spoken conversation much of what occurs in individual minds is never captured or expressed, for often the topic has moved on before a speaker can break his or her silence. So what happens when the conversation is written instead? This might give us a fuller record of the dynamics of reading in time, of how readers in concert with others construct a more complex mental representation of the text before them. By engaging with both the author's words on the page and the words of other readers scrawled in the margins, we might come to see how the reading insights of others help us refine and keep open our own responses and interpretations.

Writing in the Margins: A Temporal "Experiment" in Social Reading

To explore the social conversation that ensues when mature students write conversationally together in response to a poem, I gathered four experienced readers to read a poem they had not seen previously. Because I had decided to be absent from their written conversation, I had left the four readers with copies of several as yet un-published poems by Julia Kasdorf, though she was not identified as the author. This placed them in a reading situation not dissimilar to what occurs when one picks up the latest *New Yorker* and reads a poem without previous knowledge about the poet.

The poems appeared in the middle of a large piece of paper (25 x 14), which provided ample margin space for their written responses. I encouraged any kind of marking – underlining, arrows, question marks, single words or phrases, longer comments or queries – to record the progress of their reading, how it evolved in its frustrations and satisfactions. They could go back through the poem as often as they wanted, relating whatever occurred to them, including questions, interpretations, and connections to their personal experience or to other works of art. The key, however, was to resist talking among themselves until they felt finished with their written conversation.

...Ability tracking restricts student reading development...

When they came to a resting place in their initial response writing, they were to exchange papers with someone else and continue with their written responses, now circling between the poem and the marginalia accumulating on the page. This exchange process was to be repeated until, minimally, each reader had marked something on everyone else's copy. They could, of course, return to any copy more than once, depending upon the written conversation that was developing. How long this would take was not clear; I just asked them to follow these procedures and see what happened when they entered the flow of sharing their written responses with each other.

The poem they decided on was "First Gestures:"

Among the first we learn is goodbye,
a tiny wrist between Dad's forefinger
and thumb forced to wave bye-bye to Mom,
whose hand sails brightly behind a windshield.
Then it's done to make us follow:
in a crowded mall, a woman waves, "Bye,
we're leaving," and the boy stands firm
sobbing, until at last he runs after her
among shoppers drifting by like sharks
who must drag their great hulks
underwater, even in sleep, or drown.

Living, we cover vast territories;
imagine your life drawn on a map –
a scribble on the town where you grew up,
each bus trip traced between school
and home, or a clean line across the sea
to a place you flew once. Think of the time
and things we accumulate, all the while growing
more conscious of losing and leaving. Aging,
our bodies collect wrinkles and scars
for each place the world would not give
under our own weight; our thoughts get
laced with strange aches, sweet as the final
chord that hangs in a guitar's blond torso.

Think how a particular ridge of hills
from a summer of your childhood grows
in significance, or one hour of light –
late afternoon, say, when thick sun flings
the shadow of Virginia creeper vines
across the wall of a tiny, white room
where a woman makes love for the first time.
Its leaves tremble like small hands
against the screen, while she sobs
in the arms of a bewildered man, too young
to see that as we gather losses
we may also grow in love –
as in passion, the body shudders
and clutches what it must release.[1]

Their written "conversation" lasted close to an hour, though the participants (Heather and Alfie, who were working on doctorates in English, and Darlene and Andy, who were working on doctorates in English education) reported they could easily have spent double the time had they not had previous commitments. The marginalia were extensive and multifaceted, but presenting their written words in sequential fashion fails to capture the participants' reported experience of feeling freer and freer as they went along. They also described their written exchanges as circular, as yielding a sense of "all-at-onceness" – something difficult to render in any linear transcript. Their written conversation did reveal, however, that their readings grew more complex and satisfying because they had been part of a social venture. Beginning with their own insights, they reached out in tentative and non-dogmatic ways to incorporate and build on each other's responses. By combining the various strands into an ongoing talk of inquiry, we catch a glimpse of the democratic play enjoyed by these four readers.[2]

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[1] The poem was later published in *Poetry*, CLXV.5 (1995): 261-2, and is printed here with permission.

As expected, this written conversation begins with each reader struggling to make some connection with the unfamiliar text. Darlene, for instance, tries to piece together line 5, "What's the antecedent – What's done to 'make us follow'? Why the colon after that?" Then associating the wave with "underwater" [line 11] she continues her questioning, "Is it the wave that makes us follow? Wave as seduction?" At the very end of the poem, Andy asks, "What must be released?" and, trying to sort out images between the first and last stanzas, wonders, "Boy firm / leaves (woman?) trembling (sobbing?). Is the firm boy now bewildered man?" These questions, as ways into the poem, also engage the readers in considering their own understandings of human behavior. The very first line provokes Darlene to write, "They teach us to say goodbye – no – we *learn* it." This triggers Alfie to respond, "What do we learn? To replace our feeling of loss with a gesture. Here, if anywhere, is a place where the world refuses to give way, the sweep of our arm is the first line."

In this mutual exploration, the readers imagine themselves within the events of the first stanza and take account of their feelings. Heather detects a "hint of violence" in lines 2-3, and Alfie agrees, "For some weird reason I feel nervous about this image – like the baby's wrist will be crushed." But Andy expresses an opposite feeling, "Hmm – I felt safe here – as if being guided and held securely!" Darlene, on the other hand, joins the majority when she adds, "But it's about *force* – not safe for me." Further, she notes that "The separation is forced" [6-7], to which Alfie adds, "Forced to leave the mother. From this comes the bewilderment – which is just another way of *refusing*, then, to be there for her." This in turn prompts Alfie to wonder about the father's role in this departure, "Why isn't Dad more implicated? Why doesn't he do something? Or do we take away from the mother the power to separate from us – while we also blame her for it."

For Andy, however, Alfie's question leads nowhere, "Implicated in what, I wonder?" But Andy does wonder about the word "Mom" when he writes, "Why not Mommy? Softer. *Mom* tough on the lips, not *mn. . .mom* – closed mouth, tight lipped utterance with a gasping center." The concern here is very much about families, about the mother and father relationship and their responsibility for the child. Heather joins in, "Yes! The father is urging this separation from the mother – jealous? (Sorry, I can't help it – I've been trying not to be reductively Freudian – but there you are.)"

There is much agitated response to the shark image. Andy notes, "Not something I would associate with shoppers." But Alfie does try to connect the image to the place: "Except maybe at xmas when you need to hold your breath just to be able to stomach another trip to the mall." Despite this interpretive move, Heather remains dissatisfied: "Why sharks – who perceives them as dangerous – author, boy, woman?" Alfie confesses that he "actually forgot the danger. Maybe it was because they seemed lumbering, like shoppers. My guess is that they're like boys, bewildered but possessing sharp teeth." Heather extends the image but does not reverse its feeling of danger: "cave of the sleeping sharks in Mexico – nurse sharks, fairly benign, but still ominous." And she wonders, "What does underwater mean to the shoppers?"

Later, Heather makes a key remark about perspective, "Why the strange union of a terrifying animal and an unwieldy, lumbering, almost stupidly benign mindlessness? Is this how children think of grown-ups?" which Andy confirms as a "Great question! I'm inclined to think so." Alfie then connects the closing lines of this stanza to another text, "What do the shoppers drag themselves under? The misery of being alienated from the means of production? Makes me think of *1984*, gray people with dust in their pores lumbering along, as if in sleep, but a dreamless sleep, that you wake from feeling tired and lumpy." And Darlene adds a coda, "And underwater – dragging – moving slowly."

The second stanza exposes two fault lines for the readers: the image of the map and the contrast between a poetry of abstract ideas and a poetry of narrative presence. Andy expresses his appreciation of the speculative ideas of this stanza: "I like the shift here – it sucks me into the poem." But Darlene disagrees, "Somehow this stanza pushes me away." To which Alfie jokes, knowing well Darlene's preferences, "Because there's no story in it." Then Heather gives a reason why she likes the second stanza: "Funny, I liked this stanza best – maybe because it seemed the least gendered. Also the least claustrophobic – movement outwards, solitary." She sees the map as a dynamic image pointing to lines 15-16: "For some reason this is a really satisfying image to me. Visual evidence of your existence marked on a communal document, the tracing of lines repeated representing a span of time, but captured all at once symbolically on the paper." This contribution leads Alfie to write, "Traced now makes me think of taking the pattern from someone else – the only way I used to be able to draw," which summons a humorous personal touch from Andy, "Still the only way I do!" Darlene then repeats her concern about power and agency, as she writes about the map, "Who draws it? The map is two dimensional – I don't want to imagine my life drawn on a map."

A final set of productive "disagreements" emerge as the four readers position their own histories in relation to the love-making event of the concluding stanza. Who are these two figures in terms of age, experience, power? How does gender pull us back to what the boy is learning about gestures at the beginning of the poem? Darlene focuses on who fails to do the seeing in line 35: "Does the woman see? The man is too young to see – but is the woman? Maybe – yes – I think she is too young to see – maybe not, there's only one comma." Then she wonders about the loss: "Always – the loss of reaching the top – of going over the top?" Meanwhile, the men are seeing a clear age split between the man and the woman. Next to the first stanza, Alfie writes, "Again, like below, the woman is wise, the boy young. She makes up here for the crying she'll do later. The bewilderment that protects him below makes him impotent here." Andy comments, "– Yes, but she seems more vulnerable (to me). She seems to have no agency here – he is bewildered, she sobs – what (else) is she feeling? Thinking? Doing? She's 'in the arms of. . .' Engulfed, Overwhelmed?" And Heather, continuing to employ her economic metaphor, wonders, "Possessed? How can the young man imagine the thoughts of the woman who is primarily a possession?" To which Alfie replies, "No – he doesn't have thoughts – so why should she? Or, rather, his thoughts are to himself – why would this make her cry?"

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[2] The complete version of this written conversation appears in Chapter 13 of my book, Literature for Democracy.

Gradually, as interpretations take shape and the poem is seen as a totality, the question of authorship arises. Heather comments, "Maybe I'm *totally* wrong, but I feel convinced that the writer is a man – the baby at the beginning, the boy in the mall, the young man at the end. There seems to be an analogy between the woman and the baby I don't like very much." Alfie, for one, offers his support for this thesis, "I agree. It's a man and I don't really like it. Or it's a woman – like James Tiptree [she/he, a woman science fiction writer writing as a man]. It seems like the poor boy is always at other people's command – except who ends up crying?" This query brings the gender discussion full circle, as Darlene responds, "I wasn't sure if the baby was a girl or boy – and I'm not sure how you see the analogy. I'm looking to see – what I see is that it is the 'woman who makes love for the first time' – ah – maybe there is that connection to the first line – 'Among the first. . .'" Finally, Andy adds, "And I read the baby as a boy, too. Though now the violence seen by others in the father's gesture points me to the baby being a girl. But this shifts for me, and I see the baby as a boy – in the same stanza 'the boy stands firm' – seems to point to the same child on a later stage."

What these four readers wrote in conversation with each other came to no conclusion, and this openness signifies to me that reading as a social act encourages us to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. They clearly, at least for me, exhibited democratic processes of conversation when they had the presence of mind to use the different reading associations of others to reflect on their own perspectives. By building off each other's responses and interpretations, these mature readers extended how the poem resonated for them as individuals. As Darlene later commented on the experience, "I had a sense of how free we were to move any place we wanted: to explore with others, not alone – there was no map here – one layer at a time." By not attempting to determine a poem's meaning absolutely, the readers stayed in relationship, both with the poem and with their co-readers. And other teachers are reporting similar results, even with first graders (Blake, 1996), when the reading environment draws on the readers' resources, rather than relying solely on the teacher. As one middle school teacher, Mary Kitagawa (1994), remarks, "Literature study conducted by students with restrained adult support is a powerful experience of introspection as well as social discourse" (p. 31).

...Social act encourages us to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.

The Poet Responds

While the group's commentary in the margins taken together seems full and satisfying (though hardly the last word, as subsequent "written conversations" about this poem by other groups of students have demonstrated), I wondered how it would compare with the author's intentions. Such a question does not imply some "right" answer; it does, however, start us reflecting on how comprehensive or accurate a reading should be. Were these readers overlooking something, or were they so grossly misinterpreting a passage that their conversation missed the "poem" for the "tangents"? Similarly, in elementary and middle schools where students can represent so many diverse racial, linguistic, and economic backgrounds, how do we deal with responses that can easily be quite different from what an author or teacher intended or expected?

When a poem or other literary work has a history of critical interpretation behind it, such a history can serve as a point of reference for the teacher to guide any "mis-readings" back on track. At least this might be the case in a classroom where the teacher is oblivious to democratic reading practices. Lacking such referent points for a contemporary work, and generally not having access to the author, where will the teacher's reading judgments come from? Again this raises the issue of reading authority in the classroom. From the democratic perspective I have been outlining, the teacher stops worrying about having to prepare a comprehensive "reading" to teach and instead concentrates on engaging the students' responses in the emerging classroom conversation. And such engagement will be greatly facilitated to the extent everyone in the class is responsible for finding and sharing stories and poems – producing a cornucopia of found objects waiting their turn in a reader friendly classroom.

From the democratic perspective ...the teacher... concentrates on engaging the students' responses in the emerging classroom conversation.

In this instance, however, the poet, Julia Kasdorf, was available to reflect on the "written conversation" as it related to her "intentions" and her sense of where the poem might need revising. Her remarks offer a further example of the textured layers of meaning and significance that surround the conversation that readers enter when they read socially, trying to entertain other perspectives.

For Julia, who had recently published her first book, *Sleeping Preacher* (1991), which deals with ethnic and "small" domestic scenes, this poem widened the scope of concerns that she might entertain as a poet:

> I wanted to write a "large" poem, although I was entirely conscious of the tradition and values that reinforce this notion, a tradition I'd resisted even before I could reduce its complexity by "naming" it. . . . So I suppose this could be viewed as a persona piece, a trying on of another perspective, resistance and adoration in near equal parts, responding to another in his terms. The tone turned out to be one I like, and I do not see it as an erasure of my voice, but a testing of my own range. I think this may be an important poem for me in the end, partly because of what I learned about writing and the possibilities that can come of conflict and collusion.

Given her personal background for the poem, which the readers had no way of accessing, Julia found herself immediately wondering whether the readers' responses played more of a "doubting" than a "believing" game with her words. Do poets, for instance, suspend disbelief more kindly than do experienced reader-critics? She was "troubled by the violence people found, the mean gender politics, which may be there," though previously she had not been aware of it because she had not consciously intended it. The poem, however, acts as a story, and the writer can never completely control its meaning, which continues to bleed out of the form.

While Julia did not speak directly with her readers in this instance, she welcomed the variety of their contending responses. Their written dialogue surrounding the words of her poem furthered her understanding of what she had written, thus extending the permeability of this democratic conversation to yet another level.

Robin Evans (Turnpike Elementary School) and Germaine Vega Soto (School #16) enjoy the "Sharing sofa."

Supporting Face-to-Face Conversation in the Literature Classroom

The rich conversational processes on display in this "experiment" suggest that as teachers we might exploit social writing in the margins for our particular democratic purposes. Because such back and forth writing slows down each reader and encourages them to probe deeper into their responses, it provides them with a more direct insight into the temporal process of responding to works of literature. No one formula, of course, describes this process as students experience it, as I quickly discovered on another occasion when I used this written conversation approach to Julia's poem in a class of twenty college students. Reading through the notebook entries students made in response to this reading event, I found, for instance, one student admitting that she "felt uncomfortable reading the other readers' responses, but then [she] opened up to the gist of the activity, to see that multiple readings are possible." I wonder where exactly in the literature classroom students learn to share feelings of vulnerability and discuss how what is being said affects them. Earlier, even Andy had confessed to me his self-conscious feelings, wondering if his responses would live up to the expectations of the others, whom he felt to be superior readers. This natural feeling of anxiety caused him to make very constrained and brief "responses" on his initial copy of the poem. Fortunately, however, as he joined the flow, he came to feel less threatened, and his offerings became freer and more self-reflective – it was safe for him to be vulnerable.

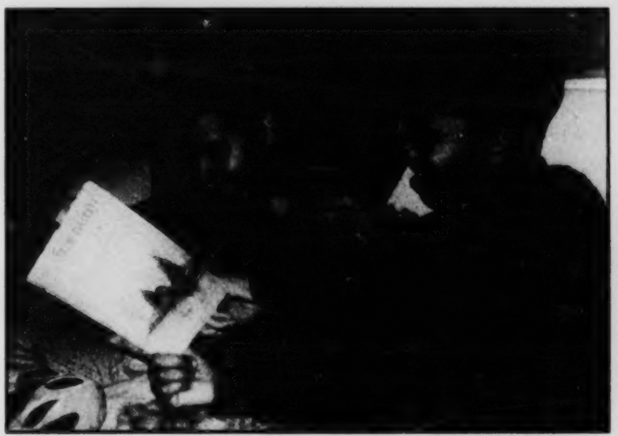
Besides the anxiety of exposure, students also discover attributes about themselves that have stymied their ability to remain open to the text: "I was struck by how quick I am to rush to judgments when it comes to poetry – I let things 'annoy' me from the start and I can't get past them." In other instances, a student might take to a given poem more rapidly than others, and this in turn can cause her to privilege her response over those she is writing alongside:

> I felt [Julia's] poem really profoundly and so at first it was hard for me to respond to others' interpretations, who weren't feeling it as deeply as I did. I asked some questions to probe ideas deeper and saw some of my same thoughts developed in different ways. A couple strands of comments really deepened, but none contradicted, my sense of the poem.

Finally, some students simply get stuck on this poem (still, there are always an endless supply of other poems to read) and, despite the engaged remarks of their peers, never manage to form any connection to what the poet is saying. Meanwhile others gradually lose patience in various ways. One student could barely hold back from speaking aloud once some ideas had been excited at the margins: "Each reading got me to spot things that I had never before seen. Then I was concentrating on the comments, using them as a means of thinking about the text in a new way. At one point, I became frustrated and wanted to discuss it already." Another student lost interest instead of trying to examine points of difference between her ideas and what others were writing:

> The first exchange was easy and interesting because I wanted to see someone else's interpretations. As the exchanges went on, I found it harder and harder to write anything else. I would respond to statements or questions that interested me but aside from that my own creativity and original thoughts were spent.

In sum, although most students find that collectively they have much more to say about a poem than they do individually, the dynamics of social reading are lost on many if the teacher does not invite them to reflect directly on the ways they are working together. Also I learn



Cesar Santos and Kurell Brown of Central Park East I share a book together.

Photograph courtesy of Margaret Vishnupad.

that our tolerance for other perspectives is much less than my rhetoric would allow. Just what are the limits when we encounter a world view or narrative so radically different that it threatens the very one that otherwise renders most of our responses coherent?

The "experiment" I have detailed here, it may be argued, depends entirely on having experienced readers who are supposed to flourish without a teacher's heavy hand. As a profession we seem hesitant to allow such freedom for elementary or secondary students. Further, the poem was contemporary. What if it was a text already laden with years of scholarship and interpretation? In such an instance, doesn't the teacher have a responsibility to deliberately fill in the reading gaps? Should a student ever be left in ignorance when an interpretive impasse has been reached? Or what are we to do when connections with the poem are just not happening? Like other teachers I continue to struggle with these questions because I constantly feel the tension that exists between my desire for closure and that additional information that inevitably highlights the indeterminacy of response. And, indeed, this concern is only heightened as even more diverse cultures join the conversations in today's schools.

Yet, despite what is generally my minority view in these matters, I think we often lose more than we gain when we fail to trust readers and instead resort to focusing our classes too exclusively on information about literature rather than the messy business of reading the literature itself. The trick in fact is to avoid any dichotomy between reader response and literary information, but instead to seek ways of teaching that ensure that they complement each other. No reading will be perfectly rendered or rounded; it is the cumulative effect that matters in literature classrooms where democratically confident readers gradually increase their familiarity with and ability to manipulate the various codes and knowledge on which a text depends. Indeed, as Patrick Dias (1987) has amply demonstrated, even young readers working together in small groups are able to create richly textured responses without any direct teacher intervention. In such settings, Dias found that students value "disagreement primarily because it stimulates further inquiry, a looking-again," something "quite in opposition to a consensus-seeking pattern that tends to operate in much classroom teaching of poetry" (p. 66). To help break the pattern of teacher interference, Dias recommends that students participate in choosing what is read. Further, they might "perform" their own readings for the class outside of the teacher's direction. Finally, Dias suggests that responding-aloud protocols – where students make transcripts of themselves verbalizing in real time how they are making sense of a text – can offer a powerful way of demonstrating to readers their own processes of reading, especially as these are compared from student to student.

... the dynamics of social reading are lost on many if the teacher does not invite them to reflect directly on the ways they are working together.

The experience of reading/writing in the margins suggests to students that the margins (and what has traditionally been marginalized) urgently need to be brought into the classroom forum. For this can represent a significant enactment of the democratic processes whereby students first have their own ideas, and then they test them. The choice, however, is not between modeling democratic citizenship on the one hand and sustaining intelligent reading on the other, nor is the teacher merely a mute bystander. Instead, reader-response criticism and our commitment to the temporal movement of reading and each reader's "story" supports our choice to take seriously students at every level sharing their responses and interpretations face to face. In this way we might nurture in students the democratic attitude that difference provides an opportunity for negotiating their perspectives together.

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Participating in Student-Led Book Clubs: The Case of Jennifer

Virginia J. Goatley & Jeanne Marie Levine

ABSTRACT

This Book Club project documents students' written and oral responses to literature. By examining the case of Jennifer, we share ideas for supporting students within discussion groups. We examine the complex nature of Jennifer's responses during literature discussions, her written responses to text, and her varying roles in the Book Club.

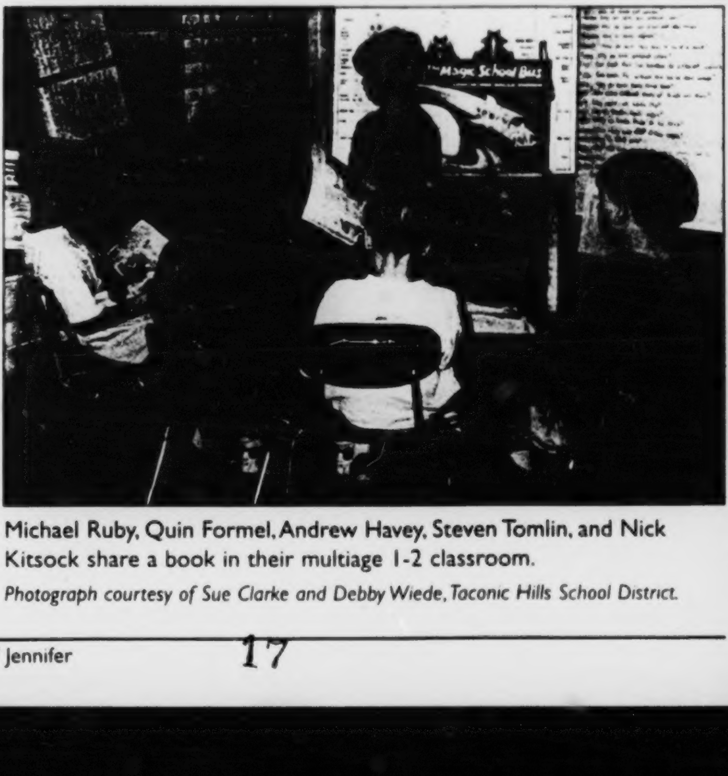
The movement toward literature discussion groups is rapidly growing (Almasi, 1995; Roser & Martinez, 1995; Short & Pierce, 1990). These groups are a powerful way for students to engage in critical discussions about text with their peers, expand their ideas and understanding of literature, and raise issues associated with the text. In this article, we explore the case of Jennifer, a fifth grader, to understand the type of support she needed for successful participation in Book Clubs.

Of Hispanic background, Jennifer lived with her young, single mother. In conversations with Jennifer's teacher, the mother expressed a strong desire for Jennifer to be successful in school, especially in the area of reading. Jennifer appeared to be making great efforts in this area by regularly readings books both at home and school. She routinely participated in classroom discussions of literature, wrote stories on her own at home, and seemed to select a wide range of book topics for independent reading.

During fifth grade, Jennifer participated in the Book Club project in a fourth/fifth grade classroom. Book Club is a literature-based reading program designed to focus on student-led discussions about literature. Book Club includes four components of reading, writing, whole-class discussion (i.e., community share), and student-led Book Clubs (McMahon & Raphael, in press; Raphael & McMahon, 1994). An instructional emphasis supports all four of these areas. The Book Club project was a longitudinal study conducted through the Elementary Subjects Center at Michigan State University to document students' written and oral responses to literature within student-led discussion groups. In this article, we explore how Jennifer's teacher and the Book Club components helped Jennifer to participate in her student-led Book Clubs.

Two members of the Book Club Project Team (i.e., Ginny Goatley & Taffy Raphael) collected data on Jennifer's literacy learning during her entire fifth-grade school year. Data collection occurred about two days per week, with more frequent observations in the spring. Data sources included her written work, audiotapes and videotapes of Book Clubs, transcripts of her taped discussions, interviews, and fieldnotes of classroom activities including Jennifer's participation within these activities. During the data analysis, Jeanne Levine helped to analyze the data from the perspective of an outside observer, that is, she had not been in the classroom and, therefore, provided a more objective view of the data. To analyze the data, we used qualitative and sociolinguistic analytic tools (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Florio-Ruane, 1987). Initially, we examined Jennifer's overall literacy engagement through her writing, fieldnote observations, and Book Club conversations. Then, we closely analyzed her participation within the Book Club discussions to understand her roles and participation patterns within her groups.

In the following sections, we focus on one week during a biography unit, to show the dynamic nature of Jennifer's various literacy activities and roles. Although we analyzed data from across the year, our decision to focus on this particular unit was twofold: (1) it was one of the last units of the year and (2) it displays the diversity of Jennifer's responses to literature in both written and oral form. During the biography unit, the learners read a variety of texts about people such as Helen Keller, Shaka, Peter the Great, and Sally Ride. Throughout this unit, the students were also writing their own autobiographies, including interviewing each other to elicit ideas and talking with their parents/guardians. We focus on the book *To Space and Back* (Ride & Okie,



Michael Ruby, Quin Formel, Andrew Havey, Steven Tomlin, and Nick Kitsock share a book in their multiage 1-2 classroom.

Photograph courtesy of Sue Clarke and Debby Wiede, Taconic Hills School District.

1986) to display how Jennifer's participation in her Book Club varied due to her strategies for discussion, her written responses about text, and her role in comparison to other members of her groups.

Strategies for Discussion

In Book Club, Deb used a variety of instructional ideas to help the students have successful and engaging discussions (see Raphael & Goatley, 1994). During community share, she regularly modeled the types of questions, comments, and contributions about literature. She helped the students think about "what" to share and "how" to share their ideas with one another (Goatley, in press). Early in the year the teacher found that she needed to help the students learn to contribute using numerous ideas and conversation frameworks, rather than simple questions and answers led by one person. She talked with Susan McMahon about how to help her students in this area and drew upon ideas from a Book Club pilot study. In figure 1, we see the range of phrases that Deb modeled and urged her students to use when they were not sure how else to contribute. Students initially seemed to benefit from such tools to keep their discussions strong and continuous.

Figure 1: Possible Phrases to Use During Book Club Discussions

Possible Phrases to Use in Student-Led Discussions about Themes

1) Asking a question

If the author were here, I would ask her/him how come she/he chose to write this book about the Civil War from the point of view of the soldier. What do you think she/he might say?

I agree with what Jimmy said. What do you think might happen if the character had not made that choice and made the other one?

In our other survival book, the character had to live alone for one month. How do you think this character might react if the same thing happened to her?

2) Statements to elicit intertextual connections

How do you think this book compares to the last book we read? I thought they were different in these ways...... I think they are similar because......

This book is similar to Paterson's other books because she always...... But it is different from the last books we read because......

In the movie, the directors made the character act mean. I did not think she was so mean in the book. When she was mean, I had a bunch of new ideas about why some of the events happened. For example,......

3) Disagreeing in an agreeable way

I want to disagree with something that John said. He said......., but I think......

I do not agree with that because (give a clear reason why you do not agree).

4) Responding to what someone else contributed

That is exactly what I thought! I even wrote that same thing in my journal. The only thing that was different is that I wondered about......

I'm not sure what you mean by that. Could you tell us why you think that?

5) Conversation starters when you are not sure how to continue

What did you think about the part of the story when,.......?

What was your favorite part of the story? Why did you like that part?

Why do you think this book is important to read to learn about *war*?

For Jennifer, we see that she did learn to use these types of phrases and questions with her group members. For example, here are a few of the questions Jennifer asked other members of her group during three days of discussions about *To Space and Back*, a biography about Sally Ride:

- Do you think that people who go up in space are scared also?
- Do you think that you would be scared if you were 195 feet from the ground?
- Would you like to walk on the moon?
- What do you think the families are thinking about their parents up in space?
- Do you know what a satellite is? Well, can you please describe it to me?
- Do you think you could prevent the food from floating away?

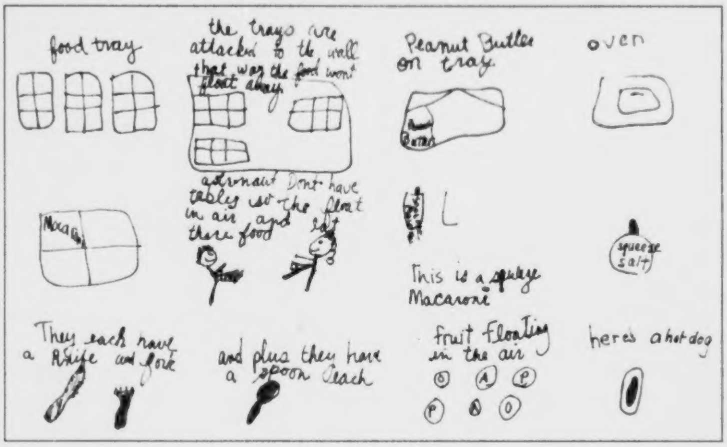
Jennifer seemed to be quite good at asking others how they felt about events in a story, how these story events related to their own experiences, how they would feel if they were in a situation similar to a story event, and asking more general factual information for clarification purposes. These types of questions helped the students to think critically about the text.

Written Response to Text

An additional support for Book Club discussion was the writing that connected to the literature selections. Each day, the students wrote in a reading log after reading the text and prior to their Book Clubs. Occasionally, the teacher asked a specific prompt for the students to write about in their logs (e.g., What do you think the astronauts thought was fun and frustrating about space?). She did this to encourage the students to think about an issue as a group for discussion during community share as well as to focus on some main issues from the book. Otherwise, students had a choice about written responses to text. Writing assisted students' text reflections and encouraged contributions to the discussions.

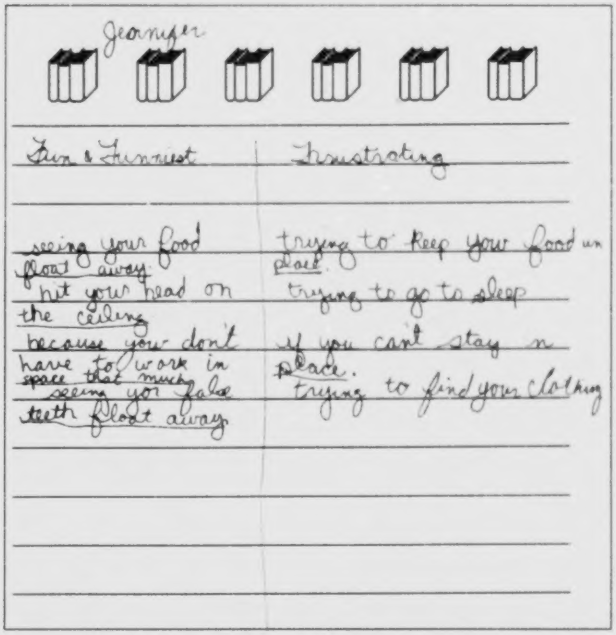
Jennifer routinely chose to write in more representative forms than in connected text. For instance, her reading logs were full of character maps, compare/contrast charts, drawing, and lists of information gleaned from the readings. When Jennifer wrote in paragraph form, our analysis revealed that the amount of ideas she presented decreased. She seemed to prefer to present information which she learned from books in a more visual way. For example, in Figure 2, she used pictures to illustrate the food the astronauts ate during their flights. This was one topic that her Book Club discussed at length

Figure 2: Jennifer's "Astronaut Food" April 10 Reading Log Entry


food tray
the trays are attached to the wall that way the food won't float away
Peanut Butter on tray.
Peanut Butter
oven
Macaroni
astronaut Dont have tables so the float in air and eat there food
This is a squeeze Macaroni
squeeze salt
They each have a knife and fork
and plus they have a spoon each
fruit floating in the air
heres a hot dog

after the issue was raised in the book. In Figure 3, she responded to the teacher's prompt about fun and frustrating thinks about space. Figure 4 shows Jennifer's use of a character map to display a variety of ideas about astronauts. In this figure, she drew upon information throughout the book, rather than on just one section. The three figures contrast in their forms of representations; clearly, Jennifer was comfortable with using many different ways to respond to text. The variety of written responses also seemed to promote Book Club discussions that went beyond simple questions and answers to discussions about the drawings, synthesized information, and associated topics.

Figure 3: Jennifer's "Fun and Frustrating" April 11 Reading Log Entry



Jennifer

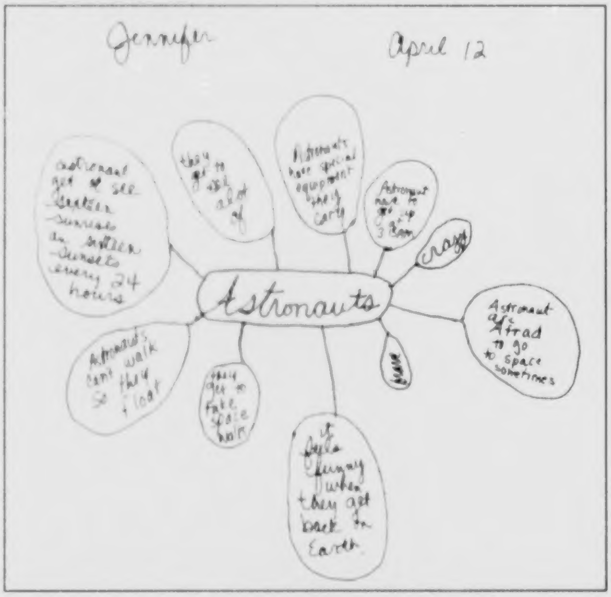
Fun & Funniest	Frustrating
seeing your food float away	trying to keep your food un place.
hit your head on the ceiling	trying to go to sleep
because you don't have to work in space that much	if you can't stay n place.
seeing yor false teeth float away	trying to find your clothing

Jennifer's Role in Book Club

Jennifer played an active role in her Book Club discussions. Her leadership role varied depending upon the other members of her group. She routinely was active in voicing her own opinions, asking questions of other group members, providing comments to keep the discussion moving, and often introduced new content for the others to discuss. Over the year, Jennifer participated in four different Book Club groups. Initially, Jennifer's participation consisted of a combination of asking questions to other group members and commenting on their responses. She questioned students about their reaction to the literature and then asked for further information when their answers did not seem to be complete or supported.

During a Book Club in November, Jennifer led the discussion about *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977) in the following manner. First, she asked the others how they liked the book and subsequently asked them "Why" when they did not elaborate. When Jean said the story was interesting, Jennifer pushed her to say what made it interesting and wondered how others might view the story. When others asked questions of her, Jennifer readily shared her ideas, though she often quickly returned to asking more questions. Jennifer showed a pattern of trying to maintain a leadership role in each group by frequently asking questions and introducing new conversational topics. This was similar to leadership roles displayed by other students (see McMahon & Goatley, 1995) that at times was beneficial to supporting peers while it also tended to limit contributions. However, Jennifer's role varied depending upon which other students were in her group.

Figure 4: Jennifer's "Astronaut Character Map" April 12 Reading Log Entry


Jennifer
April 12
Astronauts
astronaut get to see sixteen sunrises an sixteen sunsets every 24 hours
they get to eat a lot of
Astronauts have special equipment they carry
Astronaut have to get up 3 am
crazy
Astronaut are Afrad to go to space sometimes
Astronauts cant walk they So float
they get to take space walk
it feels funny when they get back to Earth

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The following two transcripts illustrate the differences in Jennifer's role within her Book Club groups, depending upon the other students in the group and her ability to take a leadership position. On April 11, Jennifer participated in two Book Club discussions about Sally Ride. Her writing portrayed ideas from the book that were funny and frustrating. First, Jennifer participated in a discussion with her regular group during the day. That afternoon after school, she went to the hospital with two other members (i.e., Helene and Randy) of her previous Book Club group to have a discussion with a fourth member (i.e., Jeffrey) who was in the hospital after a car accident.

In the Book Club with her group during the day, Jennifer played a traditional teacher-like role, in which she was asking specific questions of the others, expecting certain answers, and then moving on to another question. It is important to note that all of the other members of this group were fourth graders, a year younger than Jennifer in the multiage classroom.

20 Jennifer: I think astronauts, they have to um, they have to be fast in their work because if something wrong happens they have to hurry up and get it over with.

21 Landra: They have to clean all over but it is hard because all the dirt and wasted food and all the garbage float away.

22 Jennifer: Why do you think, do you think it would be hard to clean the astronauts, um the shuttle?

23 Landra: Because like it's going to float, everything is going to float, like all the dirt's going to float away.

24 Jennifer: Do you think it would get easier for you to clean it or not clean it?

25 Landra: Not to clean it.

26 Jennifer: Why?

27 Landra: BECAUSE, you're going to have a hard time trying to clean when everything is floating and they have a special machine to clean it.

28 Jennifer: Do you think astronauts have a lot of responsibilities?

In this transcript, several problems are evident. Jennifer took her role to an extreme of asking all the questions, listening for specific answers to occur, and interacting with only one student rather than the other members of the group. Landra appeared to become upset and impatient with Jennifer's questions, and raised her voice in line 27 as she said "Because" leading Jennifer to move on to a new question.

In the following transcript on the same day, Jennifer appears to take a much different role. She does not ask direct questions, but rather comments on ideas raised by the others and elaborates. The conversation topic related to the students' reading log entries and drew upon the community share conversation early in the day on the topic of "fun and frustrating."

15 Helene: Jeff, what do you think space food would taste like?

16 Jeff: Um, gross.

17 Jennifer: Well, in the book it said that the space food is almost the same like regular food down here on earth.

18 Jeff: It probably would be better than this hospital food.

19 Jennifer: You know what, you know what I put in my thing, my log? I put the funniest thing would be if you had false teeth and your false teeth flew out.

20 Helene: We were talking about in class one frustrating thing is if you made a peanut butter sandwich and it started floating away and got stuck on the ceiling and you look up and there was molded peanut butter on the ceiling.

21 Randy: What about if you was making a like a peanut butter sandwich and it would be hard to make it because you might have to get the other end, the other one that was floating up.

In this transcript, Jennifer's role has shifted to one in which she is much less dominate. All four students are sharing their ideas (the topic is initiated by Helene as opposed to Jennifer), and the conversation is not only to find one specific answer to one question.

Concluding Comments

Students' participation in Book Club discussions is certainly not straightforward or easy to understand. Jennifer's case illustrates the complexity of discussion roles and the type of support a teacher might provide to encourage a range of responses. The teacher encouraged the students to use a variety of written responses to text. The written responses enabled Jennifer to reflect upon and respond to the text in written form prior to engaging in discussion. This written reflection seemed to closely relate to the topics that she shared with her Book Club.

Deb supported the Book Club discussions when she used modeling, direct instruction about discussion phrases, and community share conversations about "what and how" to share in Book Clubs. The teacher played a critical role in carefully observing the groups and making decisions about who should be placed in which group. These tools seemed to benefit Jennifer as she learned how to engage in discussions about books with her peers. Within Jennifer's Book Clubs, it became apparent that even though she learned to engage in conversations with her peers based upon some of these tools, the form of the conversation varied depending on who was in her group. With some students, she tried to dominate the discussion at times and assume a leadership role similar to one of a teacher. In groups with other students, she did not always assume the leadership position. Jennifer appeared to take Deb's instructional tools about how and what to share to an extreme when she felt the other group members were not contributing appropriately.

Overall, Jennifer made progress toward responding to text in various written and oral forms. Her engagement with books increased both within and outside of school. She started to think about how text related to her own experiences and those of her peers, to imagine how she would response if placed in situations similar to the people or characters portrayed in the text, and to use writing as a reflective tool.

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for Donald Hall

PLANTING

My father was the gardener, not I.
His patient rows, his perfect fence
where the black and yellow spider spun
her web of sun and dew: I knew
him best among long vines, tomatoes'
startling rounded red, mounded earth
made rich with manure we two gathered
clandestine from a neighbor's pasture.
He taught me peppers, odd creatures from Oz,
and the purple impossible curve of eggplant
fit for Arabian carpets and dreams.
I remember mornings after rain,
the smell of it all, heady and full, still
my definition for clean in a world
gone breathless with too few blossoms.
Nights I swear I almost heard
the garden growing, even as my father
read me stories, Jack on the Beanstalk climbing
into my half-sleep, the voice beside me
lingering gift of love and magic,
the fertile air outside my window
alive from hands and hope. I am
now grown, no tender of roots, yet I
am wound with tendrils and new leaf
each time I speak, each time I teach
anyone why a poem is green,
why seeds of language dance with water
towards bright harvest, heart's long feast.

Katharyn Howd Machan

Meeting the Challenge of Tougher Literacy Standards[1]

Sean A. Walmsley

ABSTRACT

Literacy educators face some urgent challenges – more children coming to school with inadequate preschool literacy experiences and knowledge, an ever widening range of literacy abilities in primary classrooms, and now, tough new literacy standards imposed by New York State. In this article, Sean Walmsley proposes four steps to address these challenges: (1) Simple and clearly articulated expectations; (2) A well-balanced core language arts curriculum; (3) Keeping track of student's progress; and (4) Effective support for struggling readers and writers.

This is not an easy time for public elementary schools. The excitement over whole language, writing process, and literature-based approaches has given way to defending these practices against criticisms that 'basic' literacy skills are being ignored. Some even are insisting that elementary schools return to a 'phonics' curriculum.

At the same time, reducing retention rates and 'including' special education students have increased the pressure on classroom teachers to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. In some communities, shifting demographics have altered the student population quite dramatically, creating unexpected and not entirely welcomed challenges for educators in the early primary grades. More children seem to be coming to school less well prepared: they haven't been read to as much as they should; their oral language isn't well developed; they don't have a good general knowledge of the world. Despite our best efforts, we don't seem to be able to get the situation under control.

Furthermore, after several years with the New Compact for Learning, with its emphasis on shared-decision making, the New York State Education Department has decided that new, tougher standards are the key to educational reform. The new school "report cards" that single out literacy results so that parents and taxpayers can more easily compare the effectiveness of districts' literacy programs, the new literacy assessments proposed for grade 4, and tougher graduation requirements in high school, signal a clear shift in the State's educational philosophy towards a highly visible, high-stakes focus on measurable results. Notably absent from Albany is increased funding to carry out these mandates.

...I'm...troubled by our inability to ensure that all children have adequate reading and writing...

These would be formidable challenges even under the most ideal circumstances (i.e., well funded schools, up-to-date curriculum materials, unlimited professional development, supportive taxpayers). In fact, just meeting current State literacy standards (e.g., 3rd and 6th grade reading, 5th grade writing) is quite a stretch for some schools. As the new standards are phased in, there will be many schools that looked pretty good under the old standards who will be wondering what happened to their test scores. And schools that fared badly under the old system will be in deeper trouble with the new assessments.

Most educators, I suspect, are not opposed to high literacy standards. And the simple act of raising them will doubtless produce higher literacy scores for many children. But if we can't ensure that at-risk students meet the existing standards, how will they meet the new, tougher ones? We not only have to find ways to meet the needs of children coming to school with insufficient preschool literacy experiences but also accelerate them to higher literacy standards. On top of that, we have to accomplish these feats with diminishing resources!

...Challenge of tougher literacy standards is one that we should embrace...

Some might respond to these challenges by pleading for special exceptions for at-risk children, questioning the narrowness of the literacy measures, and/or confront the logic and wisdom of high-stakes testing as a principal instrument of reform. Bracey (1995), for example, disagrees with the basic assumption that all children can learn; others challenge the idea that all children should learn the same curriculum. A particularly troublesome issue is having to take responsibility for children attaining the new standards when they've only been in a school for a year or so. In the new report cards, inner-city and rural schools with high rates of student transfers will be unfairly singled out for low scores over which they have no control.

While I share many of these concerns, I'm nonetheless troubled by our inability to ensure that all children have adequate reading and writing abilities, and I'm aware of the political consequences we face when large numbers of children (even though a small percentage) do not acquire these basic competencies within a reasonable period of time. Teaching literacy is our profession; we should be good at it both in the regular and remedial classroom, and we should take responsibility for it. So the challenge of tougher literacy standards is one that we should embrace rather than try to wiggle out of. It's a good opportunity to step back and reflect on what we're doing and what we need to do differently. In primary classrooms the challenge of tougher literacy standards is a reality, not an intellectual or philosophical debating point.

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[1] An earlier version of this article was presented as a talk at the 1996 New York State Reading Association meeting.

Rethinking Our Approach

Over the past ten years, I have been working with several elementary schools to help them rethink their K-6 language arts programs. While the projects have varied in length (from several years to just a few months) and in scope (some have focused just on reading or writing, others on language arts; some have just worked on goals, others on goals, curriculum and assessment), they have collectively and cumulatively shaped my thinking about how best to reform the elementary language arts curriculum (see Walmsley, 1991). And during this period, others have been busy working on the same issues (e.g., Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Barth & Boze, 1992; Boyer, 1994; Routman, 1991, 1996). What used to count as language arts reform was bringing teachers together to select a new basal reader. We then shifted to bringing teachers together to write language arts curriculum. Neither of these approaches are sufficient for the current challenges, even though they are still popular. Instead, what I propose is to focus on a few well defined literacy goals, ensure that our language arts curriculum (i.e., what we teach, and what children experience in both regular and remedial classrooms) directly supports the goals, and assess children's progress towards the goals.

This approach has four major components: (1) simple and clearly articulated expectations-what we want children to look like as language users at various stages of their literacy development; (2) a well balanced core language arts curriculum; (3) keeping track of students' progress towards the expectations; and (4) effective support for children struggling with literacy development.

Simple and clearly articulated expectations. First, we need to set out our expectations for language arts, and clearly and simply articulate them, so all stakeholders (educators, parents, school boards, taxpayers) know what we're aiming for. I call these 'attributes,' because they represent what a child will look like as a language user at three stages of their literacy development-emergent, beginning, and independent.[2]

Attributes associated with emergent literacy might include:

- Understands the conventions of reading and writing (e.g., that text carries meaning, that print flows from left to right and top to bottom, etc.).
- Listens to and interacts with literature, and understands familiar storybooks.
- Knows the letters of the alphabet and simple letter-sound relationships.
- Reads simple words.
- Sees himself/herself as a reader/writer.

Attributes associated with beginning literacy might include:

- Can read simple text using a balance of cue systems.
- Can read and write simple stories or descriptions.
- Sees himself/herself as an independent reader and writer.

Attributes associated with independent literacy might include:

- Reads and writes for pleasure.
- Has read widely, deeply, and for a better understanding of the world.
- Has a good understanding of what is read, heard, or viewed.
- Communicates effectively in writing and speaking (using appropriate form).
- Has written on a wide range of topics and genres, for different purposes and audiences.
- Meets district- and state-mandated literacy standards.

Setting out these attributes is an important first step. It forces stakeholders to think about what's important to them about children's literacy, and it focuses everyone's attention on a few, critical, expectations. Creating a list of literacy subskills for children to master in each grade level is a more typical way of establishing outcomes, but my experience is that because these lists are far too long. They never become the sustained focus of teaching and learning. Instead, concentrate on a few, plain-English, attributes that are linked to different stages of literacy development rather than to each grade level. As you do this, examine what other stakeholders (parents, community, professional organizations, State Education Department) expect of children's language development.[3] Synthesize these rather than keep adding to them, and you'll end up with a small set of attributes that make sense to everyone and represent achievable expectations for elementary children.

A well-balanced core language arts curriculum. We often forget that a strong core language arts program – the one that children encounter in the regular classroom – is the best first line of defense against literacy failure. A good core language arts program has a number of essential components. It immerses children in all the language arts (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing). It exposes children to a wide range of literature in reading as well as a wide range of topics, functions, and audiences in writing. It engages children daily in speaking, listening, and discussion. It ensures that children acquire basic decoding and comprehension strategies in reading, and basic encoding strategies in writing (including composing, revising, and editing) by whatever means are successful. It treats language arts as essential processes in the development of children's growing understanding of the world. Further, the curriculum is well balanced across the grades so that children's language experiences are cumulative and appropriate.

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[2] These attributes are offered as examples only. They have been compiled from my collaborations over the past several years with different school districts. I acknowledge the contributions of faculty and staff from North Warren Central Schools (Chestertown, NY), Manchester Elementary School (Manchester, VT), Adams-Cheshire Regional School District (Adams, MA), Carmel Central Schools (Carmel, NY), Cairo-Durham Central Schools (Cairo, NY), Kaimiloa Elementary School and Leihoku Elementary School (Honolulu, HI).

[3] If the reader is wondering why I don't use the New York State or the NCTE/IRA language arts standards as the starting point for articulating attributes, I've found that it's more productive to start with the teachers' and community's expectations, and align these to the State's and the professional organizations' goals. If one attribute is "meets district- and State-mandated literacy standards," then the local attributes will always be aligned with the State's expectations.

Most importantly, the core language arts program needs to be linked explicitly to the attributes. For example, if one of our expectations is that children have a good understanding of what they read, then we should expect to see both instruction and experiences that focus on this aspect of language arts across all grades. If we expect that children have read widely and deeply, then our curriculum should provide sustained opportunities for wide and deep reading. And so on. Having teachers reflect, both individually and collaboratively, on the contributions they need to make at their grade level to each of the attributes is a good exercise. It irons out kinks in the language arts program, especially where children's experiences are unbalanced (e.g., children attend too much to meaning and not enough to form, or vice versa; they read too much contemporary fiction and not enough nonfiction; they read too much and write too little). Examining and strengthening the core curriculum is critical – even the best instructional support programs cannot compensate for meager language arts experiences and instruction in the regular classroom.

However, I do not like imposing a specific curriculum across the grades – some teachers will accomplish their goals better with a commercial reading or language arts series (appropriately supplemented), others with a literature-based or themed approach; some with a combination of these. What matters is that what goes on in each and every classroom provides genuine contributions to the literacy attributes we hope our children will acquire.

Keeping track of students' progress. I know many schools that have invested heavily in rethinking their language arts goals and curriculum, only to run out of time or steam when it came to assessment. Thus one philosophy and approach guides the goals and the curriculum, but another – often incompatible – guides the assessment and reporting. We need to create an assessment scheme that allows us to gather reliable and valid information on children's progress in language arts. It needs to be simple and take into account the developmental stages of language growth (for example, letter knowledge is important in the very early grades, but not later on; critical analysis and evaluation is a skill that doesn't really apply to 1st graders). Complicated assessment techniques don't work well unless everyone's well trained in them and are willing to invest the time; but if they are, then they are well worth the effort. We also need to be mindful of the new assessments currently being piloted by the State – our students will have to do well on these, and knowing where children are relative to these assessments is very important. (Incidentally, some schools will have to change their current mindset towards these State assessments. They can't, as they often do now, make the 5th grade teachers totally responsible for children passing the 5th grade writing test. The responsibility needs to be shared among all teachers.) Along with creating assessments, we need to use them on a regular basis for both instructional support and for reporting. This entails aligning report cards and permanent records with the assessments and the attributes. In many schools, the assessments and report cards are completely out of kilter with one another, and with the language arts goals and curriculum.

Effective support for children struggling with literacy development. Creating and sustaining effective support for struggling readers and writers is essential if we are to meet existing and future standards in language arts. Many children fail not because we don't know how to meet their needs, but because we didn't know they had needs or we never got around to dealing with them. Falling through the cracks is a major cause of children's literacy difficulties. Support is effective when we know what we're trying to accomplish, we know where children are in their language development, and we provide high quality assistance at the point of need. Successful support isn't simply a matter of choosing one curriculum over another – it's providing instruction and experiences, in both classroom and other settings, that are specifically designed to help children learn strategies that will promote independent literacy. There is no one right way to accomplish this: for some schools, Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) is the most effective approach; for others it's too expensive and serves too few children. Schools have to create a plan using the people and resources

Christina Riddick is comfortable absorbed in reading at Central Park East I, Manhattan.
Photograph courtesy of Margaret Vishnupad.

they have at hand, and they'll certainly need to use these more flexibly than they do now. Part of this plan is organizational (pull-out versus push-in; division of labor between different specialists; who gets served first; communication between teachers, specialists, administrators, and parents), and part is instructional (e.g., what specific approaches should we use to effectively strengthen a child's decoding abilities?). A number of educators have been focusing on these challenges in recent years (e.g., Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996; Gaskins & Elliot, 1991; Raphael & Hiebert, 1996; Roller, 1996) and so there are plenty of good examples we can draw upon.

If too many children are arriving in school without the preschool literacy experiences we've come to expect of them, then we will probably have to become more involved in preschool literacy than we have in the past. Even though this is a hotly contested issue at the State level, with no assurance that we'll see publicly funded preschools in the near future, schools need to reach out to parents and caregivers to ensure that preschoolers are read to, have opportunities to explore drawing and writing, are supported in their oral language development, and exposed to useful knowledge about the world (see Walmsley & Walmsley, 1996). If parents won't or can't provide these critical early literacy experiences, then we are going to have to become involved to ensure they are.

A Final Thought – We Need to Take Charge

Although I don't agree with Hirsch (1996) that elementary schools have failed because they've focused too much on the "how" of learning and not enough on the "what," I do think that we've failed to examine and to articulate our own expectations for children's literacy, and so have been constantly reacting to the demands of others. In cases where we do articulate our goals, they've tended to be so global (have you read your school's mission statement recently?) or so complicated, that no one, including ourselves, has a clear idea of what we're aiming for. So we're constantly trying to be all things to all people.

We urgently need to get our expectations, the curriculum, and the assessments, all aligned and put into practice, so that we know where children are relative to our expectations for them and can support them with high quality assistance when they need it. If we can do this simply, and with respect for individual differences in literacy growth among children, as well as the literacy philosophies among our colleagues, we stand a good chance of accomplishing not just basic literacy but higher standards, too. I get the feeling that we aren't keeping up with the challenge of basic literacy for many of our children, despite our best efforts, and so the challenge of ever tougher literacy standards is something we think is beyond us.

We urgently need to get our expectations, the curriculum, and the assessments, all aligned and put into practice...

If the process of reform I have outlined above helps even in small measure to regain control of our literacy mission and responsibilities, it will have been worth the considerable effort expended by colleagues in the elementary schools I've worked with over the past decade. Ensuring that children can pick up a book and read it on their own by third grade shouldn't be that difficult to accomplish, should it? And if we can do that comfortably, then we should be able to move on towards more thoughtful literacy, too.

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Performance Assessment and the English Language Arts Standards

Peter Johnston

ABSTRACT

This paper examines some of the many tensions that underlie the development and of the New York State English Language Arts Standards, and the assessments that accompany them. I consider the question of whether these have had any significant impact, and whether they are likely to in the future. I take the position that these cultural activities and that understanding them requires understanding something about the beliefs that underlie them. Effectively changing language arts instruction will involve larger changes in societal beliefs and values.

For the last six to ten years performance assessments and curriculum standards have been viewed by many as the imminent saviors of education, spawning massive efforts in numerous states. With its new Language Arts standards and performance assessments New York is following in well-trodden, but fairly fresh footprints. The move to produce a new state curriculum five years ago had several motives. First was the idea that we needed a more thoughtful literacy than the one being perpetuated in the schools. People were also aware that the metaphor of knowledge "transmission" was no longer satisfactory either for the needs of society or from the perspective of what we now know about language and learning. The intention was to provide a framework that would improve the Language Arts curriculum in a way that would be expansive, more accommodating to cultural differences and which would prepare students better for entering, and contributing to, society. A further motive was to provide some commonality in curricula across the state while allowing for substantial local curricular control based on the theory that local involvement produces local engagement and commitment.

These concerns for a more sophisticated language arts education were coupled with critiques of assessment practices. Cracks were appearing in the veneer of the multiple-choice testing industry. Arguments were made that if we want to assess writing, for example, then students should actually write, and that they should somehow write "real" things rather than short answers for no audience or purpose. Assessment, it was argued, should involve actual performance of the desired behavior and it should be an authentic performance that reflects the depth and complexity of the language arts. Viewed this way, performance assessment would produce greater validity. However, there was a concurrent argument to change assessment that worked in the opposite direction. From this perspective assessment was viewed as a tool to motivate change. "What gets tested gets taught," was the conventional wisdom, so "If you want to change teaching, change assessment." The realization was that in high stakes situations, teachers tend to teach to the test (Haladyna, Nolan & Haas, 1991), so the implication was "If we just have the right (authentic, performance-based) tests then good education will follow" (e.g., Shepard, 1989; Wiggins, 1989). It was probably no coincidence either that the testing approach to instructional change incurs minimal cost to the state. The cost is transferred to schools and teachers.

At the same time, there was concern over the effectiveness of "process" education, and a feeling that education should be on a firmer footing – more clearly specified "outcomes" (the language later changed to "standards" after the public trashing of Pennsylvania's "outcomes") with greater accountability (e.g., Shanker, 1996a). These issues were given a more pressing and controversial edge through concern over the failure of the schools to serve minority students. For all children, but for minority children in particular, it was seen as important to have specific, clear, and public standards for purposes of equity. These issues were echoed in the President's Summit on Education which concluded that improving education required standards which must be: (a) specific, (b) public, (c) rigorous, (d) high-stakes, (e) inclusive, and (f) measurable." (Sabers & Sabers, 1996, p. 20).

Tensions

Many of these ideas seem to make a lot of sense. Indeed, even our own teachers unions have become enamored with the "high performance standards" rhetoric. Albert Shanker has been using his column to push this agenda for some time (e.g., Shanker, 1996a), and the AFT and NEA journals and newspapers have taken this stance. IRA and NCTE have given more ambivalent support. But the matter is not as simple as it seems. For example, Shanker (1996b) recently wrote in his "where we stand" column about the Broad Meadows Middle School in Quincy, Massachusetts where students had voluntarily given up vacations, weekends, and their own resources for humanitarian ends. These students were inspired by a 12 year-old Pakistani boy, Iqbal Masih who had been sold into slave labor carpet-making as a young child, escaped, and become a children's rights activist. His subsequent murder prompted the Broad Meadows students to raise money to build a school in his village to fulfill Iqbal's dream. Shanker praises their highly successful campaign arguing that it shows the heights to which our students can rise if only we hold them to high enough standards, as he notes in closing the column "Our young people want to do more; they want us to expect more of them." (Shanker, 1996b, p. 4). But here is the paradox. After describing something admirable, which (a) cannot be measured in any high stakes assessment, and (b) is likely to be squeezed out of children's lives by high stakes "specific, clear and public" standards, Shanker proposes it as an example of why we need such standards.

This tension is one of many that lurk in the attempts at reforming language arts education. Although the initial efforts at curricular change through "content standards" imagined a more reflective and expansive view of the language arts, the conversations in New York, as in other places, involve "higher" standards, reflecting a narrow, linear, vertical curriculum up which we can slide the cutoff bar to ever-higher notches. This is a very different standards metaphor. This tension can be seen throughout the standards documents, and it is part of a deeper tension. The English Language Arts standards are underpinned by a view of language and learning that is fundamentally social, and a rejection of a simple behavioristic view. By contrast, the belief system associated with assessment, particularly accountability assessment, is fundamentally behavioristic (Shepard, 1991). It is based on a technological view of learning in which reward and punishment are central, particularly the punishments of high stakes accountability. New York joins 31 other states in sending out "report cards" on schools to the public in order, as the Commissioner puts it, "to inspire very rapid improvement" (Stashenko, 1996, p. B 4).

The state assessment practices are formed around "If we just hold students (and teachers) to higher standards and increase the consequences of their failure to meet them, they will learn more." The English Language Arts standards ask that we help students hold themselves to high standards – standards that are associated with collaborative language and learning practices more than individualistic, competitive practices.

Just as standards appear at first to be a good idea, plain and simple, so does performance assessment. Who could argue with the idea that assessments should involve people in actually performing a more valid, "real world" example of the behavior to be measured? It turns out, however, that the more "authentic" or "real life" the assessment, the less reliable it becomes – the less easy it is to get people to agree on the quality of the performance (Linn, Baker & Dunbar, 1991; Czeck, 1991). This might not be a problem except for the fact that State assessment practices normally have high stakes attached to them. For example, schools and teachers have test scores made public, children are assigned to remedial status, people are denied high school diplomas. Indeed, in a country in which the income of a CEO and a line worker can differ by a factor of 2000, and in which people (rightly or wrongly) view education as determining at which end of the material and social spectrum they might live, the stakes indeed seem high, and any errors seem particularly unfair.

Ultimately, the courts will probably decide whether reliability or validity is the more valued feature of assessments as soon as these tests begin to go to court in battles over retention, denial of diplomas, teacher tenure, and the like. Indications are that, in anticipation of this problem, the new assessments in this state will not be as innovative as they might have been. New York's Commissioner, who was involved in the state-wide portfolio performance assessment program in Vermont, now blanches at the mere mention of the "P" word in New York State, particularly because of this tension between reliability and authenticity. Other states have gone before us here, too. Kentucky set out to have a state-wide portfolio assessment process, but very quickly found it safer (more reliable and hence more defensible in court) to have multiple choice testing become a major component of the "portfolio."

But there are other tensions involved here too. For example, there is a tension between the extent to which teachers learn from assessments and the extent to which their judgments are reliable. In Vermont, the portfolio assessment process involves a procedure called "moderating," in which teachers get together with sets of portfolios and argue about how best to rate the qualities of them. This results in greater reliability in their judgments, but it also results in considerable learning in the process. The tension is that the more they agree, the less they are likely to learn in the moderating process. The clearer and narrower the criteria, the more they will agree.

In a similar vein, New York State, in order to be specific and public, has produced a series of examples showing what the standards should look like. This certainly increases the likelihood of people making reliable judgments of student examples. The production of such examples also involves teachers in discussions that teachers find to be excellent professional development. But at the same time this practice ties us to existing examples and discourages development beyond those examples. It increases stability in the assessment system but at the same time holds us in place. An alternative would be to emphasize the process of assembling the examples. It is that process that allows us to become more reflective about our practice and to outgrow the examples themselves, making them obsolete, and preventing hardening of the categories. An alternative would be constant, ongoing exemplars of student performances. Recording and videotaping would make possible a long term accumulation that could be sampled. But not recording them would make them constantly fresh, constantly in draft. These could then provide us with ongoing possibilities and ongoing reflection. The downside of this, of course, would be decreased reliability.

As another example of a built-in tension, the standards frameworks and the pilot assessment tasks revealed a concern for collaborative literate practices because of their "real world" nature, both in business and in a democracy. The standards asserted the need for students to be able to work with other people to generate productive conversations about books, about their own and others' writing, and to be able to work together to produce constitution-like documents. Although pilot assessment tasks have made some bold moves in this direction, it is reasonably certain that in a highly litigious society, founded on competitive individualism, these assessment practices will be the first to go. Although assessment directed at the improvement of instruction (even accountability assessment) does not require every pupil to take the same test, in an individualistic society, that is what happens. The tradeoff is that each pupil can only take a limited form of assessment. Programmatically it would be more informative if samples of individuals took different parts of a more comprehensive assessment.

…ranking students (and schools) – seems important to many people in our society.

But this would not make interpersonal comparisons possible, and interpersonal comparisons – ranking students (and schools) – seems important to many people in our society.

Are We Making Progress?

How can we tell if there has been some positive change? When there are tensions such as I have described, perhaps the best way to detect change is by the magnitude of the backlash. Last month USA Today (10/25/96) announced that "SAT carries more weight" as "more schools each year, including some elite math and science academies, are dropping the traditional A–F grading scale. Instead students merely 'pass' a course or earn verbal evaluations...." The newspaper, and its informants clearly view assessment as inadequate if it does not sort students into a hierarchy of ability. They attribute some of the "problem" to the fact that more schools and even states are moving toward (or already have) portfolios and other performance assessments. One of the side-effects, then, of efforts to produce more productive, performance-based assessments has been redoubled efforts to rank students in other ways. "After all, that's why the SAT was invented," says one of the admissions officers. If we measure effects in terms of the magnitude of the backlash, then perhaps we are making progress. In Kentucky, whose portfolio assessment program has been underway for about four years, they recently reinstated multiple-choice testing as part of the portfolio. In Vermont where they have had a portfolio assessment program, there is now talk of instituting standardized testing every year.

The conversation behind performance assessment is that the principle of testing is fine, we just need better tests and higher standards. But what will it take for children to attain the "higher standards?" Will the motivation from the threat of extra punishment produce the desired changes? It seems unlikely. We have known for a long time that punishment is the least effective way to productively modify behavior. For punishment to be effective in changing teachers' behavior, it would require them to imagine alternative possibilities. What will make that possible? In fact, the increased pressure from the high stakes accountability will simply make teachers more authoritarian and reduce the possibility of their being able to imagine alternatives.

The beliefs that tests represent cannot easily be separated from the beliefs that justify their uses (Shepard, 1991; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985). Shifting to performance assessments has not, and will not, change the functions of assessment. The real problem lies in societal beliefs and values rather than in the tests per se. If these do not change then we might expect little consequence of changing the form of assessment. We know, for example, that performance assessment in high stakes situations still has destructive effects on students and teachers (Smith, Edelsky, Draper, Rottenberg, & Cherland, 1991). In the same way, when the stakes are high for classroom teachers, instruction tends to become frozen to the specific form of the test. In the case of portfolios, teachers take over putting together the portfolio, undercutting the reflective value of the process. Unfortunately, part of the logic underlying the standards and the changes in assessment in New York is that high stakes assessment is here to stay and is somehow natural and reasonable (and a cheaper way to change instruction). But as Smith and her colleagues (1991) point out, the higher the stakes, the greater the neglect of what is not tested, and what is not tested is the more complex, creative and less easily measured.

In the end, the standards and performance assessments will have made a positive difference if they result in changes in the ways people, particularly teachers, view the language arts and their students. If teachers are to change instruction, they will have to see and value the consequences of the change. For example, if people examining portfolios do not know the significance of what they are looking at, little will change. As one admissions officer commented in *USA Today*, When you've read a few portfolios, they all start to sound the same "...We're going to have to start leaning more on test scores to compare students."

So What?

In keeping with the basic beliefs of American society, both performance standards and performance assessment efforts have been viewed as technical matters. The idea is "If only we had the right tests then instruction would improve." The standards will specify the dimensions of the outcomes of language arts instruction which will be measured by a new and improved set of tests. "If only we could build just the right test then our problems would be over. We could design instruction to fit the test." The primary question in these efforts is how to assess better. Very little consideration is given to the more fundamental question of why assess which would make us confront more directly the question "why educate?" When I think of how I would like my children to be when they leave home (and school), I think of things like caring, secure, critical of injustice, responsible, committed, and in control of their own learning. These constructs are rather broad and untechnical. It is difficult to construct either standards or performance assessments that adequately address them. Standards and performance assessments will always be caught between specificity and significance, and the higher the stakes, the more they will tend toward specificity and insignificance.

Very little consideration is given to the more fundamental question of why assess...

What is a teacher to do? The main thing is to be aware of the legitimate tensions involved and to participate in the conversations about curriculum and assessment with those in mind. We must resist the narrowing effects of the performance standards efforts on the curriculum so that we do not lose sight of why we set out to teach in the first place. We must work within our schools and communities to resist the effects of high stakes pressures on our own learning and on that of our students. For example, teachers under the pressure of high stakes assessment practices, whether or not performance-based, narrow their curricula (Smith, 1991). They also tend to know their students very differently. For example, their descriptions of their students tend to be substantially less detailed and less per-

Attaining the expansive literacy envisioned in the English Language Arts Standards will require building learning communities for teachers...

sonal, and they are less likely to mention the child's literate interests (Johnston, Afflerbach & Weiss, 1993). These effects can be extensive and will be hard to resist (Johnston, Afflerbach & Weiss, 1993; Johnston, Guice, Baker, Malone, & Michaelson, 1995; Paris, Lawton, Turner & Roth, 1991; Smith, 1991). Attaining the expansive literacy envisioned in the English Language Arts Standards will require building learning communities for teachers rather than breaking them down with high stakes assessment practices. The blaming and finger-pointing and break down of the learning community that comes with any high stakes assessment will be especially hard, but especially important to resist.

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Retention and Promotional Gates: Expensive and Ineffective Ideas Make a Comeback

Richard Allington

ABSTRACT

Flunking is an ineffective and inefficient response to students' literacy difficulties. This article reviews retention literature and strongly argues against it. Quality instructional responses within classrooms provide better answers.

American schools continue to throw hundred of millions of dollars of good money each year after a bad practice. That practice is flunking children who fail to develop the desired academic proficiencies on schedule. We have nearly a century of evidence indicating that flunking is a bad idea and more recent calculations illustrating that it is incredibly expensive as well as unproductive (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1995). Very simply, the weight of the evidence of literally hundreds of studies indicates that retaining children in grade does not produce higher achievement in the long term – retained children continue to remain behind and retention substantially increases the likelihood the child will drop out of school. Given the overwhelmingly negative effects of retention, it is unfortunate that so many educators and non-educators alike elect to support flunking kids and is unconscionable that some superintendents and school boards are considering reinventing promotional gates – setting achievement levels that must be attained for promotion to the next grade. Promotional gates will simply increase the number of kids who flunk.

But it isn't just school board members and superintendents who are talking this way. At the national education conference held last spring President Clinton raised a similar theme, and Al Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers has come awfully close to endorsing the idea as well. I don't get it. Is there sort of societal amnesia afflicting the population when it comes to this issue? Doesn't anyone else remember the highly touted New York City Public Schools Promotional Gates program? Children were held back and segregated in special classrooms unless they could pass the grade level entrance standards (Frank, 1984). Does anyone wonder what happened to this program, launched with so much fanfare a little more than a decade ago? The sad truth is that study after study demonstrated that this effort simply raised both costs and dropout rates substantially with no long-term positive effect on student achievement. The Promotional Gates program was finally scrapped (Olson, 1990) but, unfortunately, with little fanfare and no news releases, magazine articles, or television interviews. Now this bad idea is back.

...retaining children in grade does not produce higher achievement in the long term...

The research on retention (and related practices such as transitional grade classes) was summarized elegantly in *Flunking Grades* by Lorrie Shepard and Mary Lee Smith (1989). Flunking kids does nothing to solve low-achievement, and flunking is an expensive proposition. The cost of flunking kids is the average per pupil expenditure for the year's additional schooling – in New York state districts between $5000 and $9000. Consider, for instance, that the average national expenditure for remedial support is around $1000 per pupil. Or that an 8 week half-day summer school experience can be organized for around $2000 per child, including 3 hours of daily small group instruction. Or that providing low-achieving students with one hour of after-school tutoring four days a week would cost less than flunking. But few schools use these options.

My colleague, Anne McGill-Franzen, and I found flunking most popular in schools with the lowest achievement – a finding mirrored in national data. The state of Florida has kept records of how many kids are flunked and reported that as many as 40% of the elementary students repeated a grade. But Florida's educational achievement has hardly ranked among the top states even with all those flunkees. Consider that England, Germany, Japan, and France report virtually no students flunking in the elementary grades, while American rates of flunking are most similar to the rates reported for Kenyan and Cuban school systems. Flunking is one of the "simple solutions" that just does not work. Flunking is a disproven educational fad that wastes taxpayers' money and skirts the real problem – investing money in ineffective school programs.

Promotional gates and flunking generally penalize children for the failure of a school system to create effective extra-instructional plans that are needed if all children are to achieve high levels of proficiency. Instead of creating expensive promotional gate policies, schools should consider investing in educational efforts that have a track record for solving the problem of student underachievement. A good first step is investing in the quality of classroom instruction (Allington & Cunningham, 1996). Few school systems currently invest even a modest 2% of their annual budgets in professional development opportunities for teachers. Few schools have collections of recent educational books and journals available for staff to read and discuss. Few have video libraries with demonstrations of best practices for teachers to view. Few support teacher-researchers. Few send teachers to professional conferences to hear about effective programs already in place in other schools (or to hear about the studies on retention effects). Few have any coherent, long-term plan for upgrading the quality of instruction or improving the teaching environment.

Few of the classrooms we have studied over the past ten years have had an adequate supply of books of appropriate difficulty for the kids in those classrooms that are most likely to be candidates for flunking. Few schools provide classroom teachers with, say, $200 per low-achieving student to purchase the books that will be needed if the lowest-achieving children are to become readers. There is nothing in either Title 1 or special education regulations that would prevent such allocations, but few schools seem much concerned about providing classroom teachers with the materials they will need if all kids are to have any chance of meeting the new higher standards whether the achievement standards are linked to promotional gates or not. Few schools have any coherent plan for actually providing the sorts of instructional environments needed if all children are to become readers.

Instead, American school systems hop from fad to fad, purchasing lots of stuff and jiggering with the fringes of the educational process by adding an array of small, diverse programs that rarely exhibit any consistency of purpose and are rarely accompanied by any good explanation of why those efforts might work to enhance reading acquisition in the long-term (e.g., adding a computer to every classroom with no plan for software acquisition, no plan for teacher training, no plan for how a single computer will be incorporated into the classroom instructional milieu or hiring untrained paraprofessionals to work with the most challenging students or hiring a social worker to build children's self-esteem while they continue to fail).

> ...few schools seem much concerned about providing classroom teachers with the materials they will need if all kids are to have any chance of meeting the new higher standards...

Resurrecting promotional gates and expanding the use of flunking is one of but a plethora of bad ideas that is attracting attention these days. Schools should just say, "No." and, instead, examine what efforts might actually work to improve instructional quality and opportunity and thereby accelerate the academic achievement of those children who will be unlikely to attain the higher standards now being set.

The evidence indicates some kids will need larger amounts of better teaching than others in order to meet the same achievement standards. Promotional gates offer nothing to address the problems of children who find learning to read difficult. Before schools implement expensive, failed practices, someone should consider the costs – both fiscal and emotional. There are more than enough expensive and ineffective programs in American schools. Neither promotional gates nor flunking kids will solve the problem of underachievement, but both will consume educational dollars that would be better spent on effective practice.

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Germaine Vega Soto emerges as a writer.

Photograph courtesy of Robin Evans, Sage Graduate School.

Children Betrayed

Walter E. Sawyer & Jean C. Sawyer

ABSTRACT

Removing special populations from the regular classroom betrays the social contract with the child. Segregated programs deny opportunities for the social interaction components of both educational and language growth.

While there is substantial progress in integrating children with disabilities and special needs, distressingly large numbers continue to receive some or all of their compensatory and special education support in locations outside the regular classroom in the home school. The very idea of separate instruction for special populations ought to engender a sense of foreboding. In our current educational systems the practice of segregating special populations for instruction decreases the possibility that they will participate in regular classroom instruction. Nearly four decades ago, Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren spoke eloquently about the injustice of segregating minority children in their schooling. On May 17, 1954, Warren concluded the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case by stating:

> Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive children of the minority group of educational opportunities? We believe it does . . . To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to the status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way very unlikely ever to be undone. We conclude, unanimously, that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. (p. 34)

The very idea of separate instruction for special populations ought to engender a sense of foreboding.

Based on the Warren decision, Public Law 94-142, in 1975, granted civil rights to another group of individuals who had previously been excluded: children with disabilities. While both groups of children have made inroads into the educational mainstream, there is still much that needs to be done. Following the lead of Title I remedial reading programs begun in the 1960s, special education programs have frequently segregated children from the mainstream. That is, the child moves out of the mainstream to receive the special services rather than receiving these services and supports within the regular educational program.

The question is not how to improve instruction for **special populations** in segregated environments. The question that must be answered first is whether it is ethically and legally defensible to continue to provide a great deal of special instruction in segregated settings. For students with disabilities, federal law (Assistance to States, 1992) clearly states:

> That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular environment occurs only when the nature or severity is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (p. 44823)

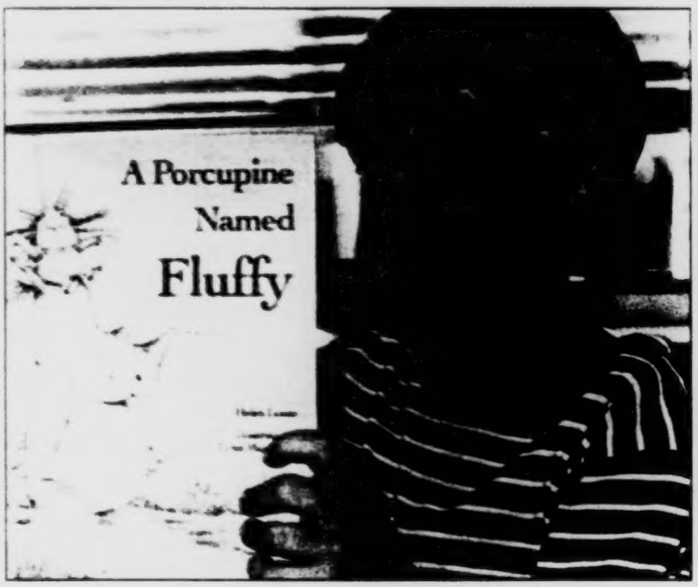
Numerous due process hearings and court decisions have resulted in regular class placements of children with disabilities; the use of the language in both the Brown case and the federal regulations have provided legal and moral support for these placements. The inclusion model for special education, in which children attend the school they would go to if they did not have a disability, has provided a positive step in this direction.

Increasing numbers of children with disabilities receive education in their home schools. However, moving children to segregated settings within the school they would normally attend is not sufficient. Our position, therefore, is that separated instruction is inherently harmful and unequal. It should be recognized as such and eliminated. Ending segregation will do much to improve the instruction of all students.

Which Children are Betrayed?

The language interactions of children are powerful and social. Unless the health and safety of children is a prevailing concern, any instructional program that removes any group of children from the educational environment of their peers deprives them of opportunities for relevant meaningful language experiences. We do not live in pull-out societies where the only groups remaining are homogeneous in their language and social abilities. When programs fail to recognize this fact, they create a mismatch between the world of school, the world of work, and the world of life. The longer children are relegated to such programs, the more concrete become the two separate worlds: the educational "haves" and the educational "have-nots." Society is very familiar with who comprises the latter group.

A number of short and long term consequences result from segregated programs. First, segregation removes the child from the real life situation of other children. As a result, such children have decreased opportunities for interaction with children who can model strategies and processes of language. We need to be aware that it is not only children with difficulties who are segregated. Many children with sophisticated language strategies, in other than standard English, also spend time in segregated programs. Absent from the classroom, segregated children have less opportunities for developing and maintaining friendships with peers. This results in fewer language opportunities both in and out of school. Children are not ignorant of these realities. Most teachers have observed children forming negative beliefs and stereotypes about children who leave the classroom to go for special help. While the primary victim of the missed classroom opportunities is the student with special needs, mainstream students are deprived as well. They lose the opportunity to both work with, and develop empathy for, others who may be less capable or simply different. This is true for gifted students as well. While their segregation in special programs is generally accepted, the lost opportunities for participation with a diverse group of peers are increasingly being exposed (Sapon-Shevin, 1994). The result of this segregation becomes problematic in real life situations which are not stratified and where understanding and communication are essential.



Henry Sombke thoroughly enjoys his self-selected book.

Photograph courtesy of Sue Clarke and Debby Wiede, Taconic Hills School District.

Reasons for Segregation

Acceptance, and even support, for segregated programs comes from two sources: educators and parents. The fundamental cause, often not discussed by either group, is an inherent acceptance of the traditional view of the purpose of education. That view holds that education's primary role is to pass down the cultural knowledge from one generation to the next (Bagley, 1938). Despite all the discussion about process and performance, we are still preoccupied with the accumulation of factual knowledge at the expense of wisdom and deeply held values. Since educational placement decisions tend to be based on such fact-centered beliefs, the logical step is to place the child in a program environment that will allow for the most efficient accumulation of factual knowledge. As school accountability has become a more visible topic, substantial increases in the number of children moving from remedial classes to special education classes has been observed (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1991). While there is variation, many states allow school districts to exempt children with disabilities from state mandated tests. In addition, federal regulations (Assistance to the States, 1992) on children with disabilities specifically state that the law:

> ". . . does not require that any agency, teacher, or other person be held accountable if a child does not achieve the growth projected in annual goals and objectives." (p. 44840)

Not surprisingly, achievement information on children with disabilities seems to be nonexistent at the state and federal level (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987).

A lack of revision of curricula is also highly related to the problem of segregated instruction. Over the past fifty years, the schools have added a half century of history, a half century of scientific discovery and a half century of literature to subjects within the curriculum. At the same time, little that was previously included in curricula has been deleted or decreased. This knowledge explosion has made the demands of classroom learning increasingly more difficult for larger numbers of students. It may be that if we address the problems inherent in the curricula and rethink our purposes for the content taught, much of the perceived need for special segregated instruction will disappear.

Politicians, social critics, and high profile educators make prominent calls for higher content and performance standards. It is a safe, but hollow gesture; few would oppose them, calling for lower standards. Missing from their rhetoric, however, is a parallel call for the higher resource standards (translation: money) that will be needed to support special needs students if they are to achieve the higher standards.

Given the general acceptance of the traditional purpose of education, educators often respond to a child in need with a positive human desire to make learning more possible and less frustrating. The possibility also exists of a less positive human desire to make life smoother and less frustrating for educators as well. While they correctly call for teacher support, teacher union officials sometimes make subtle use of the media to resist integration of children with disabilities. Albert Shanker (1994/1995) skillfully presents a negative view of integration by presenting selected factual material. Using subtle twists of wording, he cites isolated worst case scenarios and uses emotionally charged language when he states:

- How can the teacher meet these extraordinary demands without *robbing* some students? [*italics added*] (p. 18)
- . . . the principal says that getting any extra classroom help is out of the question – the school district *simply can't afford it?* [*italics added*](p. 18)

- . . . the special education *aide*, who must serve 60 children in four schools, is *stretched* pretty thin. [*italics added*] (p. 18)
- . . . the responsibility for disabled youngsters, who may need specialized medical attention (like having *catheters changed* or *mucous suctioned* out of their lungs), falls on teachers and paraprofessionals. [*italics added*] (p.19)
- . . . a student who *constantly disrupts the class* – or even assaults a teacher or classmates – cannot be excluded. [*italics added*] (p.20)
- Many . . . districts are trying to control costs by simply *dumping* students with disabilities into regular classrooms. [*italics added*] (p. 21)
- . . . many parents of disabled children oppose full inclusion. They *fear* their children will *lose* the range of services now available and end up, like those who were *de-institutionalized*, with nothing. [*italics added*] (p.20)

Children who meet the criteria for remedial or special education programs typically do so through a combination of standardized test scores, classroom observations, and teacher recommendations. Standardized test scores, often unrelated to the curriculum or the child's learning, frequently hold the most weight. In special education, the most common classification is learning disabled (LD), a classification which is primarily a judgmental disability. Because there is leeway in state and federal regulations regarding whether a student can be classified or not, it is not uncommon for a child to qualify as LD in one district but not in another.

There is a distressing lack of incentive or reward to honor the social contract to children.

Education also suffers from the myth of expertise. There is an unstated belief that only certain individuals can address the needs of various categories of children. When this is coupled with a belief that the best way to provide services is to segregate the child, separate programs proliferate. In any school, instruction is likely to be found in regular classes, remedial reading, special education, speech therapy rooms, and English as a second language classrooms. Many of these programs, especially special education, become free standing second systems within the school (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988). They continue to exist alongside, rather than within, the regular instructional program. In many cases, the same special education teacher is assigned to provide services both within the regular classroom and in a segregated location. Such an approach diminishes both the efficiency and the effectiveness of such an individual.

There are further negative implications to segregation. There is a distressing lack of incentive or reward to honor the social contract to children. There is often little encouragement or support for students when regular classroom teachers include special needs children in regular classrooms. In addition, state and federal funding formulas frequently provide increasingly greater support as placements become more segregated. Finally, many of the support programs currently in place for special needs students are based on a deficit driven model. That is, there is an assumption that a deficiency exists within the child. It may be cultural deprivation, mild brain damage, delayed development, lack of motivation, low intelligence and so on. This invariably leads to the belief that it is the child, not the program, that needs fixing.

Parents are not always well served by schools. They are often not informed, or informed in language they do not understand, of their right to insist that special education services be provided to their children in the regular classroom rather than in a segregated setting. Frequently, positive program attributes, such as less distraction and more individualized attention, are presented to parents to gain their support for segregated settings. Lowered expectations and achievements are ordinarily not mentioned. When their children are first enrolled in segregated programs, parents are typically led to believe that the placement is temporary. Once the problems have been eliminated, the child will return to the regular classroom. Unfortunately, the greater the program segregation, the less likely the child is to return to regular classroom instruction. Parents are often provided information that leads them to conclude that the segregated program is equal or even superior to the regular program. The possibility of having all, or even some, of the proposed services provided within the context of the regular classroom is frequently not mentioned. Finally, parents of children with disabilities or other special needs are often under substantial stress. They are acutely aware of their child's difficulties. The segregated instructional program can seem like an answer for reducing some of the stress.

. . . the greater the program segregation, the less likely the child is to return to regular classroom instruction.

Real Solutions for Real Schools

The first step to solving any problem is the recognition that it exists. Given that, the solution to the problem of segregation lies within two spheres. The first sphere encompasses the barriers to the solution. This includes both the tools to eliminate the barriers that we can and the desire to move beyond those that we can't. The second sphere is comprised of creative approaches for providing a relevant meaningful education to children within the regular instructional program. Both spheres must be addressed simultaneously.

Within the first sphere is the barrier of the present school curriculum. It must be reappraised. Education's purpose must be reassessed in the context of the needs of children who will live in a world that is qualitatively different from the world of their parents. It is not our purpose here to specify a new curriculum. It is our purpose to raise questions that need to be asked about current programs. Honest answers will reveal that major changes are needed in school programs, then so be it. Wiggins (1989), who has taken on the task of this reappraisal has indeed concluded that,

> The deep acceptance of the painful realization that there are far more important ideas than we can ever know leads to a liberating curriculum postulate: all students need not learn the same things. (p. 57)

Several questions must be asked: Why are we teaching all of what we are currently teaching? What amount of time needs to be devoted to each part of the curriculum? What effort is needed for children to understand these concepts? Is the acquisition of knowledge the sole purpose, or even the major purpose, of education? Is it possible for children to acquire all of the knowledge we would like them to accrue? Is it relevant that children acquire all of this knowledge? Who should learn what? Should we shift some of our attention away from acquiring knowledge and toward using and valuing some of the critical concepts embedded in that knowledge?

As an example, consider the language arts curriculum. In many schools, it contains some obvious examples of the absurd. The typical spelling program is a good illustration. Despite all we know about its role in writing, how children actually learn to form words, and its importance in relation to the other language arts, instruction in spelling persists much as it did a half century ago. School districts adopt a set of spelling books or create graded lists for classroom use. All children are assigned the same list of words each week, even though few of the words are used in their current writing. The more able students already know how to spell most of the words while the less able will need to exert tremendous effort in order to learn these words. Ironically, the more able are asked to learn less while the less able are asked to learn more. A few weeks later, many students will be able to spell few of the words from the list that they had not previously known. Yet this type of spelling instruction is viewed as having such importance that it usually has its own column on most elementary school report cards giving it importance equal to reading comprehension and writing.

This is not to say that spelling should be ignored. A common sense approach to spelling, beginning in the early grades, can address the needs of nearly all children. Spelling lists of words that children write only on their weekly spelling quizzes can be replaced with more effective approaches including the teaching of spelling within writing, individualized word lists, effective editing strategies, and dictionary locational skills.

Another barrier that must be addressed is the inherent resistance of bureaucracies to change. Besides the lack of incentive for change, restructuring typically upsets existing power structures. Bureaucracies seek to exist without dealing with the discomfort of change. If change is a possibility, the implication exists that what has been done in the past is somehow flawed.

Sometimes a total systemic change is necessary. As a tool for avoiding or postponing such change, bureaucracies frequently adapt innovations into their current structures rather than replacing existing programs and procedures with the adoption of an innovation. In this way the innovation is watered down; the old program, slightly adapted, becomes the new program. The process is concluded, and the innovation is cited as in place. When an effective innovation is adapted to fit an existing program rather than adopted to replace that program, it is usually at the expense of the essence of the innovation which distinguishes it from current practice.

Within the second sphere of solutions is the need to unify the education of children. Rather than using the regular classroom as a hub, sending children to the remedial and special education "repair shops," services ought to be provided in the regular classroom. The key to making it work is flexibility. Few children fail to learn when they are provided intensive high quality instruction. Therefore, there should be few if any exceptions to offering high quality instruction in the regular classroom. There is no compelling reason for segregating large numbers of children in order to provide them with appropriate instruction. Children have the right to receive appropriate instruction within their regular classrooms.

To reduce children to a label is to diminish them as human beings. The best way to move beyond labeling is to stop doing it. Once a child has a label, it is difficult to go beyond that label. Most are aware of the popular images of a child identified as learning disabled, mentally retarded, autistic, or culturally deprived. Such images provide little in the way of guiding instruction. Rather, we should look to the children for the clues that will guide instruction. Children who are successful in school with little or no instruction do not give us our direction. It is the children who have difficulty who show us the direction our instruction needs to go.

An instructional program in a real school needs to be, first of all, inclusive of all children. It needs to redefine job titles, duties, and locations. It needs to eliminate duplicate curriculum, duplicate instruction, duplicate materials, and duplicate locations. This can only occur if **all** teachers consult and collaborate. It requires creative approaches to both scheduling and grouping. Resources and children need to be at the same place at the same time. Training and planning time will need to make efficient use of time, resources, and schedules.

To reduce children to a label is to diminish them as human beings.

The greatest obstacle will most likely be the desire to leave present programs in place until the new process is established. This will stretch already limited resources far too thin to make the revised plan work. While there is nothing radical about providing support services in the regular classroom, there are no shortcuts or gimmicks. It will take time, effort, and patience, but it can be done.

There is a need to unify the separate elements of the education profession as well. This is particularly true in the literature of two distinct movements: whole language/process education and inclusion of children with disabilities. Whole language approaches and content area approaches that stress the importance of process are based on the belief that nearly all children can have their instructional needs met within a unified program. Most professionals are quite familiar with the names found in the professional literature. Such teachers recognize the names of Donald Graves, Ken Goodman, Jerry Harste, Lucy Calkins, Nancy Atwell, Mara Sapon-Shevin, Yetta Goodman, Marie

Clay, Frank Smith and others. Yet how many language arts professionals are familiar with Lou Brown, Richard Villa, Marsha Forest, William and Susan Stainback, Michael Giangreco, Richard Schattman, Douglas Biklen, Jacqueline Thousand and Alison Ford, the dominant names of inclusive special education? The fact that there is so little mention of the names of one group in the literature of the other lends further support to the argument that, within education, belief systems often operate parallel to each other when they could and should interact with each other.

Finally, for inclusive programs to be successful, schools need to make far greater use of parents within the instructional program. For all of the complaints about a lack of parental support, there is little evidence to support the position. We need to honestly ask ourselves if our attitudes about parents are a major barrier to their involvement (Rasinski, 1989). (1989) presents compelling evidence showing that a belief that parents have neither the time nor desire to be involved in the education of their children is simply wrong. This confronts us with many difficult questions: Do we really want parents involved? Do we make a concerted effort to include them in our professional workshops and conferences, or do we merely ask them to run our fund raisers and chaperone our field trips? Do we inform them about what is happening in our classrooms? Do we invite them to participate in the planning and classroom implementation of our instructional program, or do we simply advise them to read to their children and make sure that homework is completed? Do we seek to relate to them as fellow experts of the learning of their children, or do we simply offer parenting workshops, implying that there is something wrong with their parenting skills? Do we seek to maintain a provider/client relationship with parents, or do we plan activities that empower parents to participate in the instruction of their children? Are we ready to deal effectively with parents who are militantly opposed to children with disabilities being in the classrooms that their nondisabled children attend (Grebenstein, 1994/1995)? These are uncomfortable questions, but they need to be asked. More importantly, they need to be answered.

Epilogue

It is often stated that societies are best judged by how they treat their most powerless members. If this is the case, we don't measure up very well. Our penal institutions house disproportionate numbers of graduates of segregated remedial and special education programs; it is a national tragedy. An ever larger number of children and young adults are being placed in various segregated remedial and special education programs. While some may benefit from parts of these programs, many others do not. Few children, if any, benefit from either the stigma of being labeled or the loss of opportunity to develop the social skills that only a regular education classroom can provide. These assaults on their humanity are a betrayal of the social contract a society owes to all of its citizens. As these children become adults, they may perceive little reason to support the institutions that betrayed them.

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Promoting Literacy on the Internet: A Model Classroom Activity

Dennis G. Mike

ABSTRACT

The author briefly describes the Internet as an emerging technology with potential for educational use. A classroom activity found on the Internet is described, as are the specific ways in which this activity, and others like it, can promote literate development. Recommendations are made for those teachers interested in developing similar lessons.

These are exciting times to be interested in instructional technology. Hardware and software development is progressing at a remarkable pace, as is (perhaps to a lesser extent) our understanding of how technology should be integrated into the curriculum. Perhaps the most dramatic recent development is the advent of the Internet as a presence in our culture and in our schools.

The growth of educational Internet use has special implications for reading educators. Regardless of how we may feel about the increasing presence of the "Electronic Superhighway" in our lives, we have to acknowledge that, as more schools get connected, students are likely to be doing more of their reading and writing on-line. Electronic though it may be, the Internet is still a machine that runs on literacy; despite advances in multimedia and voice recognition, users still communicate with the system largely through reading and writing. This, however, does not necessarily mean that aimless surfing of the World Wide Web (often referred to as WWW or simply the Web) will result in students who are better readers and writers. As with the world of print, some classroom uses of electronic text and the Internet are more powerful than others when it comes to promoting learning.

In this article, I am going to make the case that the Internet lends itself particularly well to those classroom activities that promote the "higher-order" aspects of literacy: critical or evaluative reading, synthesis of information, organization of information – in short, those factors that involve students in thinking about text. Students need to acquire these skills but only rarely get an opportunity to practice them in the classroom (Durkin, 1978-1979).

> ...as more schools get connected, students are likely to be doing more of their reading and writing on-line.

In discussing the potential of Internet use, I will first provide a brief description of the Internet and the WWW. An Internet activity found on the WWW will be summarized, as will be the specific ways in which this activity promotes literate development. Finally, recommendations are offered to those teachers interested in planning similar Internet activity for their own classrooms.

A Brief Description of the Internet

The Internet is difficult to define because it is not a single entity. Instead, it is a loose confederation of thousands of computers from various sectors of society: education, business, government, the military, etc. The Internet is a network of computer networks, at least 30,000 of them (Lewis, 1994). Each individual system brings something different to the whole; databases, library services, software repositories, electronic journals, essays, graphs, maps, photographs, movie clips, sound clips, etc. The end result is a vast, if somewhat disorganized, accumulation of information, resource tools and communication facilities. An individual with access to any one computer connected to the Net has access to the entire network and almost everything on it.

> ...the Internet lends itself particularly well to those classroom activities that promote the "higher-order" aspects of literacy...

The most common use of the Internet is communication. Th Internet user may correspond with individuals who are known (through e-mail) or with groups of people who are personally unknown, bu who share similar interests (through LISTSERVs and News Groups). The Internet is also used widely for information retrieval, ofte through the use of tools capable of searching the entire system.

There are two main sections of the Internet. "Gopherspace" is tha part of typically accessed through character-based computers (e.g. an older IBM-compatible personal computer). The user negotiate Gopherspace primarily through a textually presented menu structure often several layers deep. In contrast, the World Wide Web (als referred to as WWW or, simply, the Web) incorporates graphics an sound; it is far more colorful and visually engaging, while less intimidating, to new users.

The Web is the fastest growing and most dynamic part of the Internet. There are an estimated 300,000 organizations represented on the World Wide Web; in addition, there are countless other sites operated and maintained by individuals. The number of Web sites on the Internet is increasing at a rate of at least 3,000 percent per year as, each week, hundreds of new sites are added. As a mirror on society, the Web reflects both depth (i.e., there often is a great deal available on a particular subject) and breadth (i.e., an extremely wide variety of subjects are available). For example, 293 Web sites are accessible for those interested in dance. There are 698 sites devoted to hobbies, 3,713 to games and 4,576 to sports. Michael Jackson "appears" on more than 6,000 World Wide Web home pages; President Clinton shows up more than 5,500 times (Violanti, 1996).

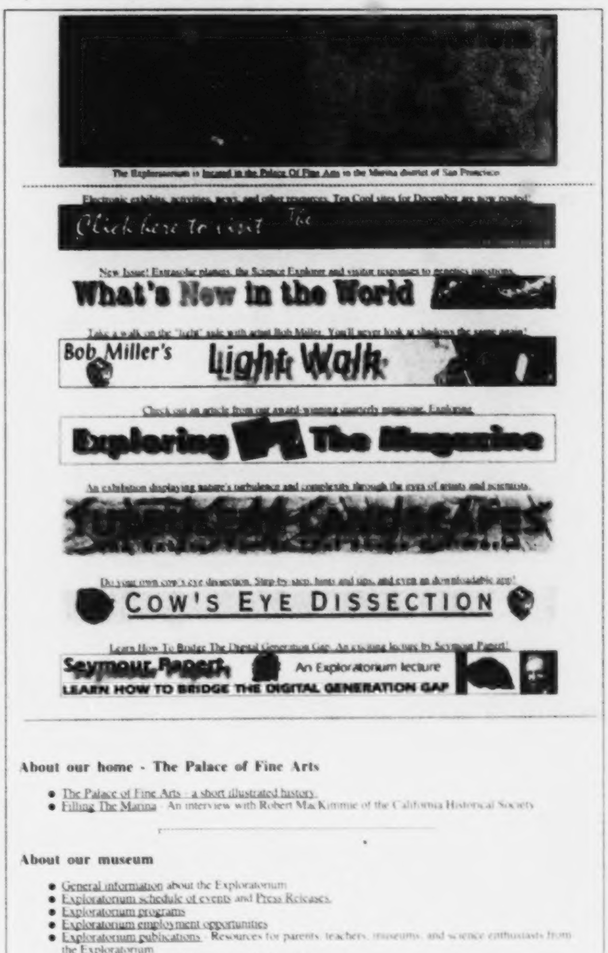
World Wide Web documents are generally written in non-sequential sections, or hypertext. In hypertext, the user can jump from topic to related topic throughout the Web, picking out a path along the way. (The term for this kind of navigation is "surfing.") The emergence of hypertext as an organizational feature of the Web is significant; it may well influence literate behavior and textual forms well into the next century (see Reinking, 1994).

An Example: The Great Satellite Search

A good example of an Internet classroom activity is the "Great Satellite Search," a lesson developed by Regan Lum, a science teacher at the Abraham Lincoln High School in San Francisco. Mr. Lum's lesson is posted on the home page of a Web site operated by the Exploratorium (3601 Lyon Street, San Francisco CA 94123; the Web address, or URL, is http://www.exploratorium.edu). The Exploratorium is a museum that also functions as an educational center. Designed on the principles of experiential learning, the Exploratorium contains over 650 interactive exhibits, primarily in the areas of science, art, and human perception. The museum's WWW site demonstrates this emphasis on active learning. It contains a "virtual" on-line representation of the actual museum, as well as a great many other instructional resources, including detailed lesson plans and materials. The Great Satellite Search is one of these lessons. (It can be accessed directly at http://www.exploratorium.edu/learning_studio/satellite/sat.html).

The Great Satellite Search is a problem-solving, simulation activity. In it, students are assigned to cooperative groups. Each group adopts the functions of NASA employees assigned responsibility for an actual satellite. Student groups face the realistic problem of funding – if they cannot convince the Congressional Subcommittee on NASA Spending (i.e., the rest of the class) that their particular satellite serves an essential function, funds will be discontinued and the satellite will be allowed to burn up in the atmosphere. Students are given the task of searching the Internet, seeking information regarding the development and function of their satellite, as well as retrieving data and pictures collected by the satellite. Groups then make presentations to the rest of the class in the form of persuasive arguments for continued funding. In making their respective cases, students are asked to make liberal use of visual aids (posters, overhead transparencies, models, etc.) and handouts.

Figure 1: Exploratorium



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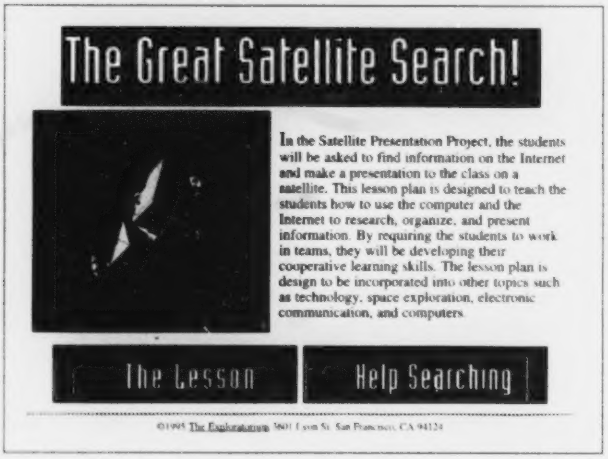
They are also asked to submit research logs detailing the method through which their information was located and hard-copy printouts of all references and materials found.

Figure 2: The Great Satellite Search



In the Satellite Presentation Project, the students will be asked to find information on the Internet and make a presentation to the class on a satellite. This lesson plan is designed to teach the students how to use the computer and the Internet to research, organize, and present information. By requiring the students to work in teams, they will be developing their cooperative learning skills. The lesson plan is design to be incorporated into other topics such as technology, space exploration, electronic communication, and computers.

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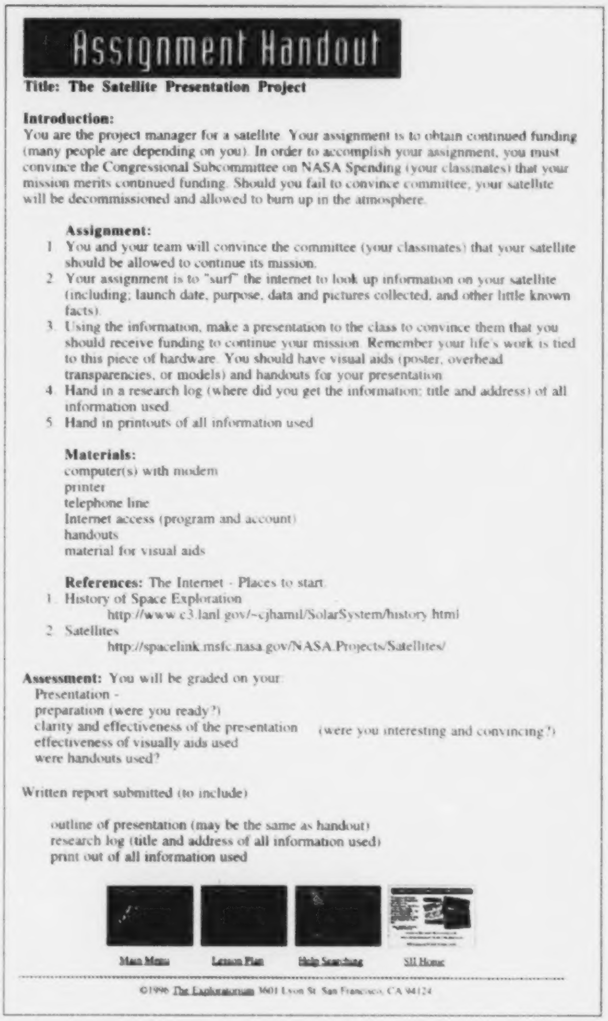
This lesson would take place over the course of several class periods, although it could be adapted as a shorter activity. While it is explicitly intended to mesh with a 9th grade science curriculum (specifically in the areas of technology and space exploration), the activity provides a platform for extensive cross-curricular activity, as well.

In order to make use of this lesson, the teacher needs a computer (sufficiently powerful to access the World Wide Web), a modem, a phone line, an Internet account and a printer. Everything else is provided on-line in a lesson packet that includes:

- the lesson plan,
- an assignment sheet, given to students as an outline of the task they'll have to complete,
- a blank research log, which students fill in to report the Internet paths taken to their objective(s),
- a list of the criteria by which the student projects are evaluated
- a list of Internet sites related to satellites, space exploration, etc.
- an on-line mechanism for teachers who adopt this lesson to provide feedback on its classroom effectiveness.

The role of the teacher in this activity is one of facilitator of learning, rather than purveyor of knowledge. The teacher presents the task, serves as a resource to students as needed, and eventually evaluates the quality of each group's presentation. However, with respect to evaluation, the main verdict comes from the other students in the class, who pass judgment on the fate of each group's satellite.

Figure 3: The Satellite Presentation Project



Title: The Satellite Presentation Project

Introduction:
You are the project manager for a satellite. Your assignment is to obtain continued funding (many people are depending on you). In order to accomplish your assignment, you must convince the Congressional Subcommittee on NASA Spending (your classmates) that your mission merits continued funding. Should you fail to convince committee, your satellite will be decommissioned and allowed to burn up in the atmosphere.

Assignment:
1. You and your team will convince the committee (your classmates) that your satellite should be allowed to continue its mission.
2. Your assignment is to "surf" the internet to look up information on your satellite (including: launch date, purpose, data and pictures collected, and other little known facts).
3. Using the information, make a presentation to the class to convince them that you should receive funding to continue your mission. Remember your life's work is tied to this piece of hardware. You should have visual aids (poster, overhead transparencies, or models) and handouts for your presentation.
4. Hand in a research log (where did you get the information: title and address) of all information used.
5. Hand in printouts of all information used

Materials:
computer(s) with modem
printer
telephone line
Internet access (program and account)
handouts
material for visual aids

References: The Internet - Places to start.
1. History of Space Exploration
   http://www.c3.lanl.gov/~cjhamil/SolarSystem/history.html
2. Satellites
   http://spacelink.msfc.nasa.gov/NASA.Projects/Satellites/

Assessment: You will be graded on your:
Presentation -
preparation (were you ready?)
clarity and effectiveness of the presentation (were you interesting and convincing?)
effectiveness of visually aids used
were handouts used?

Written report submitted (to include)

outline of presentation (may be the same as handout)
research log (title and address of all information used)
print out of all information used

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How This Activity Promotes Literate Development

The Great Satellite Search was designed to provide learning in a particular content area (i.e., technology and space exploration) and to teach students how to use the Internet as a research tool. This lesson was not intended to "teach reading." It does, however, provide a context through which students must exercise, and hopefully refine, certain literacy skills. In order to complete the Great Satellite Search, students must engage in the following literacy-related behaviors:

- Students must develop, then refine, a search strategy. This search could be simple as exploring the sites provided by the teacher or as sophisticated as performing a full Boolean search of the entire Web (i.e., use of the terms "and," "or," and "not" in combination within a multi-term search string). When done

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right, this is a process that requires the application of logical thought to the reading process.

- Students must sit down and review the information they have retrieved through their search, determining which materials are most relevant to their purpose and which can be discarded. This part of the activity requires the application of evaluative thought to the reading process.
- After determining what information is most relevant, students must arrange it into a coherent whole. This process involves the organization of information.
- Because they are faced with the task of making a persuasive argument for continued funding, students are forced to consider their audience. It has been suggested that sensitivity to audience is an essential component in the development of both readers (Fielding & Pearson, 1994) and writers (Calkins & Harwayne, 1991; Graves, 1995; Murray, 1991).
- Students must work together to solve their shared problem. Because of the textual nature of their task, such an arrangement naturally involves students in literate interaction, another key component of literate development. Learning, most especially language learning, is socially elaborated (Bloome & Green, 1984; Fishman, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978); students learn literacy best in conjunction with other students.

To sum up, the Great Satellite Search promotes literate development in several ways. In this lesson, students are encouraged to thing logically about text and to make evaluative judgments about it. They must organize textual information for the authentic purpose of constructing a persuasive argument. Throughout the activity, reading and writing behaviors are fully integrated and students engage in literate interaction. In short, the Great Satellite Search places students in an engaging context in which they cooperatively practice comprehensional and compositional behaviors. If students are to master higher-order aspects of literacy, such as critical reading, these are exactly the kinds of practices they most need to rehearse.

I am not trying to suggest here that a teacher has to access the Internet, or even a computer, to engage students in higher-order literate activity. Good teachers have been promoting development of this kind for years with just the printed resources at hand and a little creativity. However, the Internet can help expedite the process. For example, the extent of informational resources found on the Internet may far outstrip the range of printed resources available locally, especially in financially strapped or geographically remote districts. Furthermore, on the Internet, research can be carried out within the classroom itself. Through the communication capabilities of the Net, students may work directly with nationally known experts or, for that matter, with other students. In addition, the classroom computer itself (assuming the provision of a word processor and presentation software) expedites the organization of information and the creation of a final product. Because students can post their projects on the Web, the Internet also offers a means through which these can be disseminated or published.

Unfortunately, these logistical benefits carry with them some cause for concern. For example, just because something is found on the Internet does not necessarily mean that it is true. There is no overarching governing body that checks the veracity of material found on the Net. By its very nature, the Internet is anarchistic: anyone who wants can post pretty much anything. Students need to be made aware of this. Furthermore, Internet access, in conjunction with word processing, makes it relatively easy for students to intentionally or unintentionally plagiarize material; they can simply "cut and paste" it into their own work. For this reason, conventions for citing the work of others need to be explicitly taught.

Factors to Consider and Recommendations

The Great Satellite Search is one example of creative instructional activity that makes use of the Internet. While hundreds, perhaps thousands, of similar activities are posted all over the Net, it would be unfortunate if teachers restricted themselves to those lessons developed by others instead of coming up with their own ideas. For those teachers interested in testing these waters, the following recommendations are made:

- Construct the lesson around problem-solving tasks. Such tasks provide a clear-cut purpose for literate activity, as well as being inherently engaging. In this, we can learn from the examples of some of the most successful commercial software for education. Problem-solving activities can take the form of mysteries to be solved (as is the case with the Broderbund's Carmen *Sandiego* family of software), rescue operations (as is the case with Tom Synder's *The Great Ocean Rescue*), historical simulations (as with Tom Synder's *Decisions, Decisions* family of software), simulated journeys (as is the case with MECC's *Oregon Trail*), and so on.
- Select a topic for which several accessible Internet resources already exist. For example, the Great Satellite Search makes use of the multitude of resources and materials available online through NASA. The difficulty of the assignment can be adjusted through the number of on-line resources provided to students (i.e., the longer the list, the easier the assignment).
- Make good use of cooperative grouping. The composition of groups can be arranged in such a way that a) each student has a distinct responsibility within the group (e.g., budget director, technical staff, communications expert), and b) each student's contribution is necessary to completing the whole picture. It may also be possible to employ a cooperation-within/competition-without model, wherein students work together within groups, but compete with other groups to see who can solve the problem first. (This arrangement would not have worked well with the Great Satellite Search because students served as audience and evaluators for each other.)
- Make sure the activity culminates with a tangible end-product. It is not sufficient that students find information on the Internet: they must actually create something with the information. This end-product may take the form of a written report, an oral presentation, or a multimedia presentation. Whenever possible, consider posting these on the Web and inviting response from others.

- Students should present the methodology employed in locating information to the rest of the class. This is not only instructive to others, but the "side trips" described can provide ideas for subsequent projects. In the case of the Great Satellite Search, reporting on methodology was done through the Research Logs provided to students.
- Any materials retrieved from the Internet should be submitted as part of the project. These not only provide insight into the development of the project but may also be of possible use to subsequent classes.
- Encourage the incorporation of printed materials into the activity whenever possible. While students should be allowed, of course, to access printed materials from conventional sources, such as libraries, there are ways the Internet can help in this respect, as well. For example, students can access on-line library catalogs on the Net and then receive printed materials through Interlibrary Loan. Students may engage in e-mail communications with scientists or other experts, who may refer them to books or journals. Above all, the Internet should be seen as a supplement to printed materials, not as a replacement for them.
- Don't ignore the potential for cross-curricular activity. For example, the Great Satellite Search could easily tie into a lesson on government and legislative processes.
- The teacher should adopt the role of facilitator. Beyond presenting the task and evaluating results, the teacher is there to provide support when needed. The teacher may initially require students to report their progress, or to report for further instructions, at certain points in the activity. This structural support may be gradually withdrawn as students become more familiar with the nature of the task.

Jesse Milligan, a kindergarten child, explores the Internet.

Photograph courtesy of Julie Chiaramonte, Sage Graduate School.

- Remember that activities such as the Great Satellite Search *provide practice* in higher-order literacy skills; they do not *teach* these skills. The teacher has to do that, preferably through modeling. Only when the teacher is confident that students have a basic understanding of the processes involved should the full-blown Internet activity be initiated. Again, the teacher withdraws instructional support gradually.
- Remember that special needs students may need additional guidance to participate in this kind of activity. The hypertextual nature of the WWW may confound students with learning disabilities, causing them to become "lost in hyperspace" (Balajthy, 1990; Neilson, 1990). This is not to suggest that Web use is inappropriate for special needs students. Quite the contrary, these students require practice in activities that promote comprehension as much as, if not more than, any other student. Frequently, such practice is sorely lacking in the instruction provided to those with special needs (Allington, 1985).
- Teachers who develop their own Internet activities should consider doing as Regan Lum did, and post their lessons on the Net, inviting response from other educators. In focusing on the potential benefits of classroom Internet use for students, we sometimes forget that it can serve as a powerful teacher support, as well. One of the really impressive things about the Net is how well it expedites ongoing communication between those of similar interests. Teacher areas can be found on the Net for any conceivable curricular area or student profile. These areas serve as forums for reflective teacher thought on any aspect of teaching, technological or otherwise.

Conclusion

Recently, Taffy Raphael gave a keynote address at the National Reading Conference in which she presented an extensive review of classroom research in literacy instruction (Raphael & Brock, 1996). In this review, she identified four factors that have been consistently associated with effective literacy instruction. These factors are:

1. Effective instruction occurs in meaningful contexts.
2. Effective instruction involves active student engagement in constructing meaning.
3. Effective instruction requires teacher knowledge of a repertoire of instructional strategies in literacy.
4. Effective instruction involves dynamic conceptions of teachers' and students' roles during instructional events.

The kind of classroom activity described in this article relates directly to each of these four factors. First, because the Internet is an extension of our society, it provides a context meaningful to the lives of students. Second, because activities such as the Great Satellite Search require students to engage in problem-solving while they manipulate text, children are actively engaged in the construction, as well as the generation, of meaning. Third, use of the Internet as a tool of instruction provides one more item added to the teacher's repertoire of strategies, one that is likely to become far more important as the Internet assumes a more prominent role in our lives. Four, by its very nature, the kind of Internet use described above requires teachers and students to adopt flexible roles; students become the gatherers and purveyors of information, while teachers become facilitators of learning. It can be seen, then, that the proper use of the Internet is highly consistent with principles effective literacy instruction. Consequently, it deserves our full consideration as an unusually powerful tool of literacy learning and instruction.

...the Internet... provides a context meaningful to the lives of students.

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"Poetry is a Gift You Get and Never Out Grow:" Sixth Graders Discovering Poetry

Barbara Combs, Jean Arnold & Elizabeth Mascia

ABSTRACT

Learners construct understandings about literature by immersing themselves in it. This article provides a rich description of the ways in which a sixth grade language arts teacher and her students came to understand poetry through a six week inquiry study. The authors provide stories and details that will guide classroom teachers should they choose to implement similar genre studies in their own classrooms.

Students walked into class, and in their usual fashion, gathered their folders and journals from plastic storage bins. As their teacher, Jean Arnold, handed back papers, some students looked to the chalkboard to see what additional materials they would need that day, while others chatted with their peers. When students began to settle into their seats, Mrs. Arnold flicked the light switch and began to speak, setting the agenda for this day's class:

> What I really want you to do [today] is have a share session. I want you to pick one of the eight poems you selected for your project that you think is the most creative and then we're going to share that one.... Next, choose one of your original poems to share with us. The last thing I want you to do is to look at your essay, "What is Poetry?".... Choose two or three sentences that you think would say the most about what you think poetry is. We're going to take time now for you to select [these items] and re-read them, so you'll be able to read it in the group more smoothly.

For ten minutes students poured over their poetry project portfolios, reading, selecting, and practicing for the share session. Then, they pushed back desks, formed a circle and spent the next hour talking with each other about the meaning of poetry in their lives. The works of Shel Silverstein appeared to be favored by most, but others liked poems by Fisher, Wordsworth, Dickinson, and Longfellow. Students enjoyed those that were "ridiculously funny," those that were "pretty," or "jumped out at you," and those that related to their lives. For these sixth grade students poetry had become a special way of seeing, feeling, and connecting with the world. This is clearly demonstrated in the definitions they shared with each other:

- Poetry is a sea of colors that flow through my mind;
- Poetry is a picture being painted with feelings and emotions. [It] can explain simple things to the impossible things in brilliant colors;
- Poetry is something that comes from the heart; your true feelings bursting out on paper;
- Poetry is a brush that reaches far beyond the clouds.

As students read aloud these definitions of poetry, it was readily apparent that a key learning outcome posed by their teacher over six weeks earlier had been met. She wanted her students to come to an understanding about poetry that transcended the mechanistic spitting back of memorized poetic elements. For Jean, learning about poetry was not to be a teacher-set task or a goal to be reached, "but rather a truly enjoyable experience, an orchestration filled with hope." Jean

Figure 1: Comparison of Students' Concepts of Poetry

Early: What is Poetry?	**Later: What is Poetry**
• rhyming	• rhyming
• relaxing, scary, sad, humorous	• relaxing, scary, sad, humorous
• a painting, picture, feeling	• a painting, picture, description paints a picture
• smooth flow of words	• using the senses
• sound – onomatopoeia	• phrases
	• smooth flow of words
	• sound (onomatopoeia, alliteration)
	• figure of speech (simile)
	• ideas of concepts (e.g. death)
	• react emotionally
	• events, activities
	• tell a story
	• meaningful
	• new way of looking at an idea
	• look at real everyday things
	• help you sort out thoughts and feelings

wanted to empower students to become critical readers, writers and lovers of poetry.

"Empowerment" is fast becoming a cliché in education. At times, however, no other term seems apt to describe a learning outcome. As defined by Giroux and McClaren (1996), "empowerment refers to the process whereby students acquire the means to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside of their immediate experience in order to broaden their understandings of themselves, [and] the world...." (p.318). Students are empowered whenever they expand their means of self-exploration as well as self-expression, and whenever they gain access to the expression of others.

Students in Jean Arnold's classroom were empowered through the avenue of poetry. In constructing meaning through poetry, they experienced/entered into the feelings, ideas and moments captured by others; they discovered and expressed important parts of themselves in their own creations. We hope that by sharing the journey Jean made with her students, we may encourage teachers and students to embark on their own journey towards understanding the gift poetry brings to others' lives.

Introducing the "Givens"

The term "givens" is derived from a constructivist approach to instruction (Foxfire Approach, 1994), and as the term implies there are certain requirements or non-negotiables that the teacher develops in order to maintain the academic integrity of the inquiry study as well as provide a means for assessing student learning. By the end of the first week, students had been immersed in reading, talking about and responding to poetry in their booklets. Jean felt that enough student investment had been built, and students were ready to be introduced to the "givens" for the unit's culminating project. Jean gave the students a handout, and using an overhead containing the same material, walked them through the requirements (see Fig. 2). The "givens" of the poetry project articulated the desired learning outcomes (Fig. 2) for the unit and became an organizational tooi, a guide for the daily instruction and learning activities for the remainder of the unit. Within the parameters of the "givens," the students were free explore and learn about poetry in a student-directed rather that teacher-directed way.

Figure 2: Poetry Study

You will think and reflect on "What is Poetry?"
You will discover a variety of poems.
You explore the terms and techniques of poetry.
You will make choices and have an end product that will include:
  Your definition of "What is poetry?"
  Eight individually selected poems with an explanation of why each was chosen.
  At least two original poems that you have created.
  A bibliography and a decorated cover.

Underway

For the next two weeks, the classroom schedule fell into a classic workshop pattern (see Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994; Rief, 1992). We do not intend to give a day-by-day unfolding of this phase of the poetry study; instead, we will illustrate through teacher and student stories the essential components of the unit: read-alouds, mini-lessons, self- selected reading, writing, student reflection, and sharing.

Read Alouds and Mini-lessons

Jean began most class sessions with a read aloud of a favorite poem selected to allow students to experience some specific aspect of poetry. The mini-lesson that followed often elaborated on the topic. The object of these mini-lessons was to expose students to poetry's myriad modes and subjects, always expanding their conception of poetry.

Additional mini-lessons were given in response to Jean's observations of students during reading and writing time. She was aware, for instance, that students were having difficulty writing responses to poetry. Students were required to read poems of their choice and write in their poetry notebooks responses explaining why they liked the poem. She was disappointed in the lack of depth students brought to the writing, so she decided to model a mini-lesson on response to poetry:

"Here is my favorite poem and why I like it." The list of reasons generated during this lesson are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Reasons for My Poetry Selection

1. Title
2. Picture
3. Memory/recollection – an experience
4. Triggers emotion
5. Suggestion
6. Wonder, surprise
7. New, original thoughts
8. Give examples
9. Liked rhyme
10. Meaning & sense
11. Liked simile
12. Funny
13. Lesson to learn
14. Something you do
15. Smooth flow of words
16. Same hobbies
17. Made you feel
18. Unrealistic/creative
19. Imagery, senses used
20. I like the sounds
21. Reminded me of a person

Other mini-lessons were given help scaffold students' response writing. In addition, Jean read from a variety of poetry telling her students, "It is difficult to write a response if you are reading only funny poems; try some serious ones as well." The responses in the class remained quite varied: (the one liner) "I like the poem because it's funny" evolved into more thoughtful commentary. After reading Shel Silversteins's "The Baby-sitter," Jacob wrote:

> I liked the poem "The Sitter" because the babysitter thinks that she is supposed to sit on the baby. The poet creates a play on words and explains that the babysitter is taking the title of her job literally. The picture was hilarious of the babysitter sitting on the baby, and the baby-sitter's hairdo.

Time for Reading and Writing

At the heart of the inquiry study was the time given for students to "live poetry." In keeping with Rosenblatt's (1983) theory of literature as exploration, Jean provided great chunks of class time in order to "...foster fruitful interactions, or more precisely transactions between individual readers and individual literary works" (p.27). These sixth grade students read a wide variety of self-selected poetry, wrote and gave oral responses to their favorite poems, and practiced the art of writing poetry for themselves. We all agreed with Liz's comment, "If kids go to the [reading] cart and can not find something to connect with, you're dead in the water;" Some students, like Donald, made several trips to the cart sampling from many different kinds of poems while "stretching his legs." Other students, like Andrew, selected an anthology and read from it the entire workshop time. Jean recognized that each student's reading of a poem was unique. Rosenblatt (1978) described such reading transactions as events in time where the reader "...brings to the text [his] past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, [he] marshals [his] resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought and feeling a new order, a new experience which [he] sees as the poem" (p12). Although Jean could not be part of her students personal reader experience, we view her role as much more than an assembler of books. In keeping with a reader response approach, Jean held mini-conferences to guide, suggest, and sometimes directly challenge students, hoping always to move them towards a deeper understanding of poetry. Often, she asked students to return to the text to point out the images, phrases that caused their reaction.

The intersection of mini-lessons and students' activities during independent reading and writing time occurred on more than one occasion. We could see students picking up on Jean's suggestions and demonstrations as they read from books she had used or wrote to mimic a technique or style. This can be easily illustrated through Kara's and Edward's experiences. One day, Jean began class by reading from *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (Volavkova, 1993). After reading, she explained that the book consisted of works written by children who were prisoners in a Nazi Concentration Camp in WWII. As students moved into the workshop time, Kara approached Jean, asking, "Can I read that book today? I am Jewish, and I think I should know about this."

Edward, too, was moved to respond to a read aloud. Jean brought in the book, *The Eyes of Gray Wolf* by Jonathan London (1993). She introduced the book by telling her students that although the text was a story, not a poem, she wanted to share its poetic language with them. After reading the story, she and her students talked about the words and phrases that made the story seem liked poetry. She left her students with the thought that "sometimes it's OK to borrow words and ideas that you admire." Within seconds of the start of workshop time, Edward asked Jean whether he might go into the reading lab to work on the computer. He stayed away only a short while returning with a draft of this poem:

Wolf

The wolf is slowly creeping through the whitened trees,
Preparing for the hunt.
Supine, he's ready to pounce
the fox falls to the ground with a thud,
the wolf ravenously eats it's prey
After its meal he climbs the spine of a low ridge
Then facing the moon he howls.
It echoes from the mountain to the valleys

The confluence of topic and interest allowed Edward to write immediately. At the end of the poetry study, he spoke of how proud he was of the words and images he used in the poem. Edward is labeled learning disabled in language expression, but we saw no signs of a disability as he wrote, read, and talked about "Wolf."

Student Reflection

A critical component of any inquiry study is the presence of on-going student reflection. Students need to know for them selves that they are growing in their understandings about the subject matter. Jean asked students to reflect on their learning in two key ways. First, she asked students to keep personal responses to the poems they were reading as well as to information they were gathering about poets, poetic terms, and techniques. These musings were kept in their poetry booklets. In addition, the poetry booklet served as a place to gather class notes and a bibliography of their favorite poems. Jean would read and respond to students' entries on a regular basis. The poetry booklet provided the fodder from which students created their culminating projects, poetry portfolios.

Second, the class would continually revisit the question asked at the begin of the study, "What Is Poetry?" Each time Jean placed the transparency on the overhead, students would add new information, based upon their on-going reading, writing, and conversations about poetry. (See Fig 1 for an illustration of their growing understandings.) This reflective process would prove invaluable at the close of the inquiry study, as students developed essays offering their definitions of poetry.

Sharing Discoveries

The constructivist perspective on teaching and learning holds that students develop deeper understands about subject matter, issues, and ideas when "they are encouraged to engage in dialogue, both with the teacher and with one another" (Brooks, 1990, p.70). Jean provided for two distinct types of sharing activities to encourage student interactions around the topic of poetry. First, she spent time at the close of most workshop days, asking students to share a poem they had written or discovered. Such formal sharing extended the students' knowledge, directed them to new books and ideas, and allowed them to act as authorities on poetry.

Jean did not schedule formal sharing on all workshop days because she did not want to interrupt the flow of the reading/writing time if students were heavily engaged, and she did not want the sharing process to become a stale, required recitation of poems. In order to be sure then that students were consistently interacting in ways that would help them share their understandings, Jean encouraged students to engage in "quick and quiets," a phrase penned by Liz. Students could quickly and quietly talk to a peer at anytime during the workshop. By establishing the routine of "quick and quiets," students were given built in permission to share a poem, information about a poet, or a writing idea with their peers.

It is important that we add this final thought before moving on to the end phase of the inquiry study. In this second phase of the unit, the teacher presented herself as a fellow explorer with the rest of the class members. She read poetry and shared her discoveries about it with her students. She was the "expert other" constantly nudging her students to operate within their "zone of proximal development" (Dixon-Krauss, 1996) in order to make connections and new discoveries about the concept of poetry. Students responded, enthusiastically bringing their finds to the whole groups. As the unit progressed it was obvious that students were finding a comfort level with poetry. Early trepidations fell away; poetry was no longer an alien genre.

Bringing It All Together

During the entire time that students had been immersed in the reading and writing of poetry, they also knew that they were to be gathering information in their poetry notebooks in order to demonstrate their understandings about the genre. Jean made it clear that although she wanted them to enjoy their journey, they had the responsibility to read widely and to learn as much as they possibly could about their subject. At the end of the two weeks of immersion into poetry, it was time for students to synthesize the information they had been gathering and "show what you know." Jean designed a culminating poetry project to accomplish the synthesis and demonstration of student learning. In addition, she engaged students in two experiences that helped keep poetry alive for the remainder of the year.

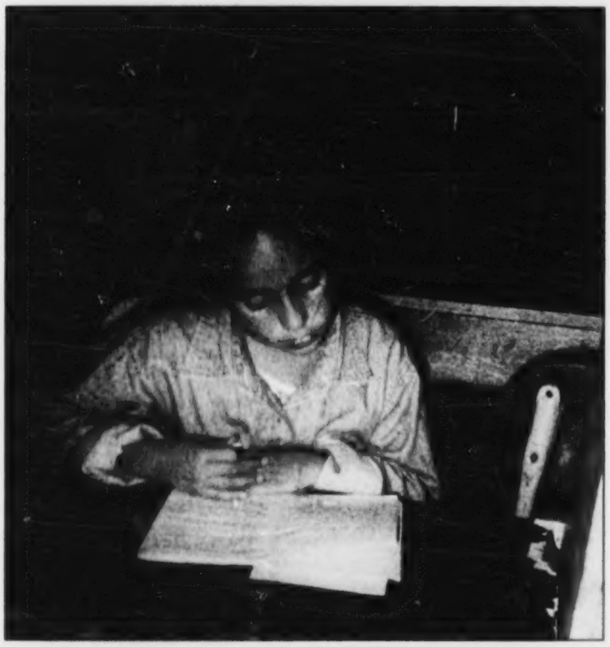
Poetry Projects

By the end of the first week, students knew that they would be assessed on their learning by preparing a poetry portfolio which included the following items: a poetry essay addressing the question, "What is poetry?;" eight self-selected published poems, each with an explanation as to why the poem was chosen; at least two original poems; a bibliography and a decorated cover. During the final two weeks of the inquiry study, students spent many days in the computer lab, using a word processing program to prepare their portfolios. Jean also spent some class time preparing students to write their required essay. She modeled the writing of the essay in a mini-lesson, demonstrating how the students could draw from the on-going list they had developed. She encouraged students to select from three or four descriptors on the list and offer details to support their choices. Jean was very pleased with students' writing: "I think the essays, on the whole were very impressive. They were really poetic. The students knew what they wanted to say. They had the information they needed and wrote the essays in only two days."

Jean assigned one grade to the poetry portfolio and a separate grade to the essay, "What is Poetry?" Once the projects were completed and the grades given, the inquiry study was officially finished, but Jean was not satisfied. She wanted poetry to remain an on-going part of her students' lives.

Keeping Poetry Alive

Jean and her students found ways to stay in touch with poetry inside and outside of her classroom. A few days after the completion of the poetry study, Jean asked her students to respond to following prompt in their journals: "We've done so much in poetry, and we've become so knowledgeable in it. How can we keep it alive for the rest of the year?" The students were eager to offer suggestions. "Post our favorite poems," one said. "Have poetry readings one day a week," said another. "Let's devote read alouds to poetry," a third added. Jean dutifully recorded the students suggestions on an overhead trans-



Daniella Colon of Central Park East, Manhattan, is learning to live the line.

Photograph courtesy of Margaret Vishnupad.

parency. Together teacher and students had developed ways to continue their connections with poetry for the remainder of the year.

It was obvious to Jean that her students had learned a great deal about poetry and were proud of their poetry portfolios. She wanted to be sure that they got the chance to demonstrate their new understandings with the larger community. She accomplished this goal in two ways. First, students' poetry portfolios were displayed during a school open house. Second, Jean and her students worked together to create a school calendar that incorporated students' original poems. Students also formed committees to complete the calendar. Two research committees were responsible for adding quotes on poems and poets as well as poets' birth dates to each month. The art committee illustrated the calendar, and a fourth committee created a classroom display for open house where the calendars were sold. The proceeds from the sales were donated to the school librarian, so that she might purchase more poetry books.

Race (by Jason)

I am a runner,
Pouring out onto the fresh track.
Arms pumping, legs straining
Sending dirt flying high into the fresh morning air.
Body straining.
My last grain of strength slowly ebbing away.
But suddenly, with a great surge.
I flash across the finish line.
I am a bolt of lightening
Wearing a radiant smile.

Conclusion

For six weeks Jean Arnold and her students immersed themselves in the study of poetry. Students lives were touched by poetry as they explored the genre through reading, writing, speaking and listening to the words, rhymes, metaphors, and images of published and novice poets. We end this article with a small sample of the their original poems as way of giving our readers a gift we hope they will never "out grow."

What is Black and Blue?
(by Amy)
Black and blue is the color of the eye
when you get hit.
Black and blue is the color of your toe
when you jam it.
Black and blue is the color of your finger
when you break it.
Black and blue is the color of bruises,
And I have the black and blue spots to prove it.

My Music
(by Andrew)
Whole note, slow like getting up in the morning.
Half note, boring like an opera.
Quarter note, regular like Monday
8th note, moving like a good time.
16th note, panting like a rabbit.
32nd note, dropping like your stock.
64th note, breaking like a window.

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Daniel, M. (1991). *A child's treasury of seaside verse.* NY: Dial.

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Hoberman, M. (1993). *Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers.* NY: Penguin Books.

Hopkins, L.B. (1973). *Time to shout.* NY: Scholastic.

Janeczko, P. (1990). *The place my words are looking for.* NY: Bradbury Press.

Little, J. (1986). *Hey world here I am!* Toronto: Kids Can Press.

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Prelutsky, J. (1990). *Something big has happened here.* NY: Greenwillow.

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for Margaret Dietz Meyer

WISE WOMAN WORKS
WITH WORDS AND WORDS
IN THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

where paper eyes
come questing truth
pens risking
self-disclosure

they tremble here
facing at last
language
that has shamed them

not clear enough
unoriginal
illogical
riddled with flaws

how to climb beyond
dank earth
that muddies
stars of thought?

Wise Woman offers
ink-bright hands
holding a mirror
of light

and welcomes them
with years of voice
shaping ladders
to their skies

Katharyn Howd Machan

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Comparing Story Reading and Textbook Reading: Middle-Level Readers' Understanding of Text

Margaret Morgan

ABSTRACT

Middle school students' comprehension of narrative and expository text were examined. Results indicated that expository discourse was more difficult than narrative, particularly with respect to important (main idea) information. Although low-achieving readers extracted detail information as skillfully as high-achieving readers, they were considerably less sensitive to the main ideas in both discourse types. Implications are discussed for all teachers of middle level youngsters on the importance of providing specific strategies to their readers for understanding their textbooks.

The process of reading comprehension is an intriguing area of study. Several theories have attempted to unravel the reading comprehension process. One of the prevailing theories maintains that reading comprehension is an interactive process. This interactive model of reading comprehension is based on the schema-theoretic perspective that knowledge is semantically organized in the reader's head (Pearson & Spiro, 1980; Rumelhart, 1980). With this view, reading comprehension is regarded as an interactive and ever-changing partnership between the text and the reader.

From an interactive perspective, a skilled reader derives meaning from text using both top-down processes (Goodman & Goodman, 1979) and bottom-up processes (Juola, Schadler, Chabot, McCoughey, & Walt, 1979). Top-down processing reflects how reading comprehension is an extension of natural language learning, whereby print is meaningful, personal, and socially significant to the reader. Thus, the reader relies heavily on the contextual influences of the reading task to derive meaning from the text. Bottom-up processing in reading comprehension involves the utilization of specific skills (e.g., decoding for rapid word recognition) for transforming English orthography into meaningful text.

Moreover, a proficient reader actively constructs meaning from the text by using a number of knowledge structures: including lexical, syntactic, semantic, schematic, planning (for inferencing), and interpretive (e.g., for understanding the discourse genre) structures (Mason, 1984). Application of these knowledge structures enables the reader to instantiate concepts as s/he actively and continuously modifies hypotheses to create meaning from the text.

To further facilitate the meaning-making process, a high-achieving reader is a strategic reader. While interacting with the text, the competent reader relies on metacognitive strategies, acknowledging the manner in which s/he reads. These strategies may include: relying on prior knowledge, critically evaluating the discourse content, attending to and summarizing the main ideas of the text, monitoring text comprehension, actively questioning for text meaning, inferring, creating new meanings and testing old ones, predicting upcoming text, clarifying misunderstandings about the discourse, and understanding the purpose of the reading task (Palincsar & Ransom, 1988; Vacca & Vacca, 1996). Moreover, during the use of these strategies, the competent reader develops a sense of ownership about the reading task, readily evaluating, modifying, and inferring to construct meaning from the text, and actively using the strategies in a goal-oriented manner so that self-directed reading can take place.

In comparison, it is argued by some researchers that the low-achieving reader assumes a less active role in the reading process. Low-achieving readers perform lower on measures of comprehension, rate, fluency, accuracy (miscues), listening comprehension, oral language, answering questions to reading passages, and anticipating text structures (e.g., Ackerman, Weir, Metzler & Dykman, 1996; Ume and Krachen, 1996). In addition, low-achieving readers exhibit a limited awareness and application of metacognitive strategies for comprehension. Researchers have suggested that low-achieving readers are less sensitive to the main ideas in text, and display diminished abilities to summarize, predict, monitor, question, clarify, and generate inferences in the text (e.g., Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Lipson & Wixson, 1986; Morris, Ervin & Conrad, 1996).

In the early elementary grades, a child is ordinarily introduced to reading by way of the narrative genre. Beginning readers are familiar with this type of discourse, since they have been exposed to the oral tradition of narrative by way of storytelling. Hence, there is a natural transition that takes place from the oral presentation of a story to the written convention of narrative discourse. Narratives contain a predictable structure of a goal or problem, attempt(s) to alleviate the problem, and a resolution (Stein & Glenn, 1979). By five or six years of age, most children can produce a complete narrative that includes a clearly-identified theme containing event relations in connection with a protagonist (Applebee, 1978).

As the reader advances in school years, the task of reading takes on new functions. First, there is a shifting away from the "learning to read" paradigm to the "reading to learn" paradigm. By the middle grades, reading becomes the principal means by which new knowledge about the world is obtained in school. Secondly, reading material with which the reader is expected to acquire this new knowledge, particularly in the content areas like social studies and science, is presented in the less-familiar genre of expository discourse.

Studies that have compared narrative and expository text comprehension have shown that the text structure affects comprehension and that readers develop some schema to aid in their reading comprehension (Maria and Junge, 1993; Richgels, Tomlinson & Tunnell 1993). Overall, readers score comparatively lower on comprehension measures for expository text (Durgunoglu, Mir, & Arino-Marti, 1993

McCormick, 1992). Unlike narrative discourse, expository discourse contains less predictable structures. By its very nature, expository discourse is employed to communicate new, unfamiliar information to the reader. Typically, there are no predictable structural elements with this genre. Most expository reading materials contain a combination of structures which may include cause/effect, comparison/contrast, problem/solution and description (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Meyer, 1975) Hence, the middle school-aged reader is challenged with a genre that, unlike the narrative genre, is much less predictable or familiar to him.

Deriving meaning about the world from expository material creates an even greater challenge for the low-achieving reader. In addition to tackling an unfamiliar and less predictable genre, the middle school-aged low-achieving reader is frequently presented with reading passages that are too difficult. Low-achieving readers commonly read at comprehension levels often several years below grade level (Seidenberg, 1988). Further, reading materials above the fourth grade reading level typically place greater demands on the reader to rely on metacognitive strategies such as grasping the main idea, understanding figurative language, and inferring information about the text.

This study was designed to investigate how middle-school high-achieving and low-achieving readers comprehended narrative (story) and expository (explanatory) texts. More specifically, the readers' comprehension of main ideas under both conditions was tested. Application of subject recalls provided for a more accurate representation of the readers' mental organization and strategies used during the reading process.

The two research questions targeted in this article include:

1) Do the comprehension differences in high-achieving and low-achieving readers manifest similar patterns under both narrative and expository text conditions?

2) How do the readers comprehend main ideas under both narrative and expository text conditions?.

This study is unique in several important ways. First, discourse comparison studies are less common, perhaps because of the inherent burden underlying the task of balancing the comprehension load of the two discourse types. Not only were the passages for this study matched by readability levels, but micro- and macro-propositional analyses were done to account for the semantic complexity of the texts. In addition to semantic complexity, the two passages were controlled for topic and reader interest. This study also used passages of longer length than has been typically employed in comprehension studies and examined an age group that has been overlooked in the reading comprehension literature.

Method

Subjects

Forty-eight seventh and eighth grade readers served as subjects. Two groups of twenty-four were identified according to reading ability: high-achieving readers and low-achieving readers. The mean age of the readers was 13 years, 7 months, with a range of 12 years, 3 months to 14 years, 11 months. All subjects were randomly selected from two urban middle schools located in the southwestern region of the United States.

Readers were grouped according to the 1992 National Percentile score (NP) and National Curve Equivalent score (NCE) received in total reading on the national SRA (Science Research Associates, 1985) examination. A receptive vocabulary score was obtained to rule out any subjects with scores outside the normal range of two standard deviations. Table 1 outlines the mean scores of the readers on total reading and vocabulary.

All subjects possessed a minimum fourth grade reading level as determined by the *Jordan Oral Reading Screening Test* (Jordan, 1989). All were normally hearing and native speakers of English. Cumulative school records indicated that subjects possessed no history of a receptive or expressive language disorder, and no history of enrollment in a special education, ESL, LEP or speech/language program.

Table 1: Mean scores for reading achievement and vocabulary

	Reading Achievement Score				Receptive Vocabulary Score			
	National Percentile		National Curve Equivalent		Standard		Percentile	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
High-achieving Readers	76	24	65	15	103	12	57	21
Low-achieving Readers	27	25	37	15	86	12	20	12

Materials

Two types of discourse genre, one narrative and one expository were selected. In order to more accurately assess the comprehension load of the two passages used in this study, several measures were considered. The equivalence of the two texts was defined by their syntactic complexity (readability levels), semantic composition (propositional analysis), topic familiarity (assessing background knowledge using two topically similar passages), and interestingness.

The narrative passage, entitled *The Day Nothing Happened* by Robert H. Redding (1991) is a story that equates to a fourth grade reading level as measured by both the Fry (1968) and Raygor (Baldwin & Kaufman, 1979) readability scales. The expository passage, entitled *Polar Bears* by Timothy Levi Biel (1987) also equates to a fourth grade reading level. Both passages are over 800 words in length. In addition, the texts balance equally as measured by their semantic load using propositional analysis as described by the work of Kintsch (1990).

The macrostructure of each passage was analyzed and broken down into levels of importance using the methodology outlined by Curran (1991) and devised by Kintsch (1990). The procedure was conducted prior to the data collection in the following way: Five expert adult readers were asked to read one of the passages. After reading it, they were instructed to summarize the text to half the length of the original text. This procedure was repeated on the second summary and again for the third summary until each expert reader produced a fourth, concise, comprehensive summary of no more than fifty words in length. Thus, each expert reader produced a total of four summaries for each passage.

Procedures

Collection of data from each reader was conducted on an individual basis in a quiet reading classroom containing no more than nine students. Each session lasted approximately forty minutes. Each reader, after responding to a Background Knowledge Survey, individually read a narrative and an expository passage about the Arctic. Each reader was presented with both passages. Order of presentation of the passages was counterbalanced by reader group.

The session began with brief oral instructions informing the student about the nature of the task. Following the introduction, a Background Knowledge Survey was administered. Subject responses were audio-taped. The survey was modeled after the research of Langer (1984), Pearson, Hansen, and Gordon (1979), and Valencia and Pearson (1989). A copy of the Background Knowledge Survey questions is listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Background Knowledge Survey Questions

1. I would like you to say all the words you can think of that are related to the Arctic.
2. Have you read anything about the Arctic before?
3. Have you studied about the Arctic before?
4. Have you ever watched a television program about the Arctic before?
5. How often do you read in a textbook?
6. Have you ever been taught how to read in a textbook so that you can understand it?

The reader was then instructed: "Now, I'd like you to read this passage to yourself. Take as much time as you need. When you're finished, let me know." Once the reader had informed the investigator that s/he had completed the passage, the instructions continued: "I want you to tell me the passage you just read so someone who hasn't read it will know all about what you read. I am going to (audio)tape what you say so I can listen to it later." This procedure was repeated for the second passage.

Scoring

After verbatim transcriptions, retellings were individually analyzed and coded to examine readers' organization and comprehension of the content contained in each passage. Readers' recall protocols were analyzed to assess comprehension of the passage macrostructure in the discourse. As readers, we approach a reading task with structural expectations (schema) and then chunk the information from the text into categories. These "meaning chunks" are called macropropositions and are a way to measure the semantic complexity of a text. "The fox was injured" or "polar bears hunt on ice" are each examples of macropropositions contained in the texts used for this study.

Statements in the final comprehensive summary that were included by a minimum of three of the five expert readers served to make up the most important (main idea) elements. These statements comprised the Level 1 statements of the macrostructure for each passage. Levels 2, 3, and 4 followed the same procedure until the statements were categorized into the four levels. This procedure was executed by the investigator and another judge familiar with this procedure. A 94% reliability measure of judgements was obtained.

Level 1 macropropositions, which represented the most important, or main ideas in the passage, typically included the topic statements, statements about passage gist, and resolution or conclusion elements (e.g., "children were hiking" or "polar bears live in the arctic"). Level 2 macropropositions were related to the important content but included more detailed information than Level 1 statements (e.g., "the children were unaware of the fox" or "the arctic is icy"). Level 3 macropropositions included statements of lesser importance to the gist of the passage but represented information that adds to the interest or richness of the passage (e.g., "the children didn't find anything of interest" or "polar bears weigh about 1,000 pounds"). Level 4 statements included text detail. This level contained the greatest number of statements (e.g., "it was cold" or "polar bears live forty years"). Table 3 presents the number of possible statements at each Level for both passages.

The readers' recall protocols were scored by assigning each text-based statement to one of the four levels of the passage macrostructures. The mean percentage of statements out of the total number of possible macropropositions recalled at each Level (1 - 4) served as the dependent measure for this study.

TABLE 3: Total number of possible macropropositions for each passage

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Total
Narrative	7	8	16	38	69
Expository	5	9	17	28	59

Results

Statistical Findings

The effects of the two independent variables (narrative text and expository text) on the main idea comprehension were analyzed from the readers' immediate oral recalls from both passages. A repeated measures univariate analysis of variance was used to compare the mean differences between the macrostructure levels. The results are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Repeated measures univariate analysis of variance for macrostructure levels

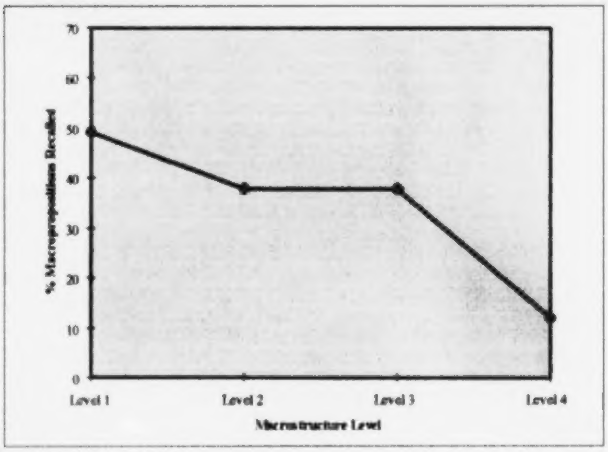
Source of Variation	Sum Sqrs	df	Mean Sqrs	F
Between Subjects				
Group	1.52	1	1.52	18.61*
Within (error)	3.27	40	.08	
Within Subjects				
Passage	2.18	1	2.18	37.31*
Within (error)	2.34	40	.06	
Level	7.16	3	2.39	193.08*
Within (error)	1.48	120	.01	
Two-Way Interaction				
Passage x Level	1.61	3	.54	28.30*
Within (error)	2.27	120	.02	

* p < .001

1) Do the comprehension differences in high-achieving and low-achieving readers manifest similar patterns under both narrative and expository text conditions?

Consistent with previous findings, low-achieving readers recalled significantly fewer statements in their retellings than high-achieving readers (p< .001). When comparing the percentage of statements recalled at each of the four macrostructure levels, Figure 1 shows that all readers successively produced significantly higher percentages of text-based statements as they represented higher levels of importance in the discourse (p< .001). In other words, of the total possible number of propositions at each of the levels of the macrostructure, readers recalled Level 1 statements best, followed by Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4 statements. These findings complement previous claims that readers recall main ideas better than detail information in a text (Fincher-Kiefer, Post, Greene, & Voss., 1988; Valencia & Pearson, 1989).

Figure 1: Mean percentage of total statements recalled at each level



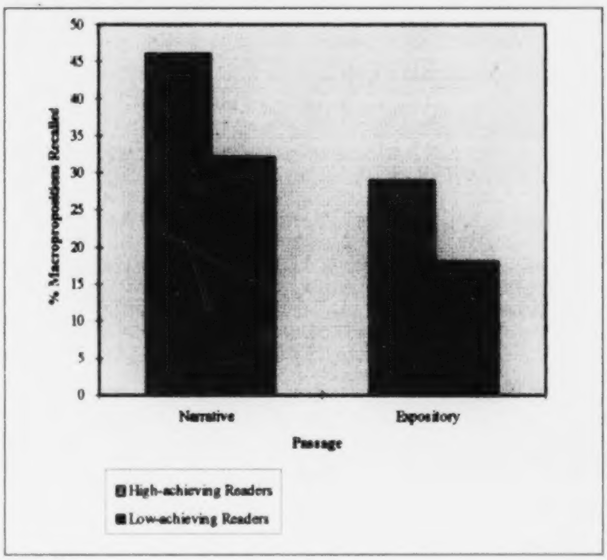
(p< .001)

Of more interest is the finding that, as shown in Figure 2, both reader groups produced a significantly higher percentage of text-based statements in their recalls of the narrative passage than the expository passage (p< .001). Yet, although both groups recalled significantly fewer statements on the expository than the narrative passage, there was no significant interaction between these two factors. In other words, the "gap" seen between the two reader groups was not any greater under one text condition than the other text conditions. The high- and low-achieving readers were equally different under both text conditions.

2) How do the readers comprehend main ideas under both the narrative and expository text conditions?

The analysis revealed a highly significant interaction between the levels of the text macrostructures and the type of discourse (p< .001). As Figure 3 points out, a significantly higher percentage of statements in the narrative passage was recalled for Levels 1, 2, and 3 statements. Readers recalled significantly more statements from the narrative passage than the expository passage for the three highest levels of the text macrostructures. For the most important elements of the texts (Levels 1 and 2), readers recalled nearly twice as many macropropositions in the narrative than in the expository passage. Yet interestingly, the readers recalled detail information (Level 4) from the expository passage equally as well as they did in the narrative passage.

Figure 2: Mean percentage of passage statements by readers

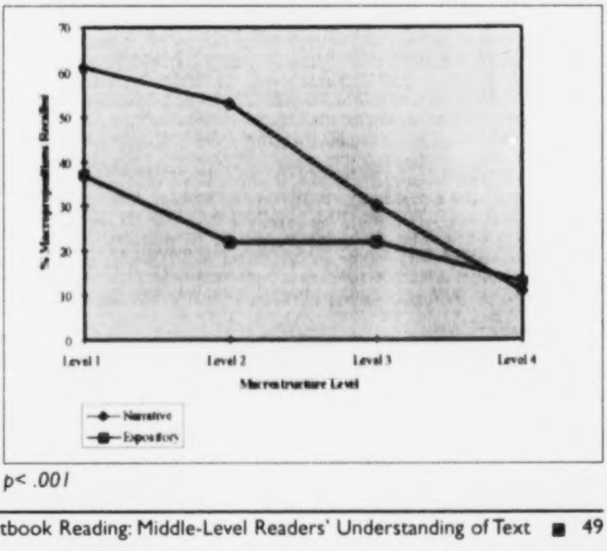


(p< .001)

Descriptive Findings

It is worth mentioning the results from the Background Knowledge Survey questions in Table 2. The responses to some of the questions found some significant differences between the groups. A two-tailed t-test of differences between means revealed that in response to Ques-

Figure 3: Mean percentage of passage statements recalled in each passage by level



p< .001

tion #1 ("I would like you to say all the words you can think of that are related to the Arctic"), high-achieving readers generated significantly more words about the Arctic than low-achieving readers ($975t = 2.35$, $p<.05$). In response to Question #6 ("Have you ever been taught how to read in a textbook so that you can understand it?"), less than one third (29%) of the readers reported that they had been taught to use reading strategies to understand their textbooks. No other differences were found between the reader groups on the other survey questions.

The high- and low-achieving readers were equally different under both text conditions.

In addition to the Background Knowledge Survey, subjects were asked to choose which of the two passages they preferred. When asked which passage they preferred, 59% of the readers preferred the expository over the narrative passage.

Discussion

This study was designed to investigate how high- and low-achieving readers in middle school understand two discourse genres, namely, narrative and expository. Analysis of the text macrostructures enabled not only a closer examination of the semantic make-up and comprehension load of the texts, but a means by which the readers' recalls could be measured in a more exacting manner.

The findings of this investigation verify the findings of previous research that low-achieving readers recall less text-based information than high-achieving readers (e.g., Irwin, 1988; Palincsar & Ransom, 1988). In addition, it supports previous studies with elementary school-aged children that readers recall fewer text-based statements in expository than in narrative discourse (see Conte, Menyuk & Bashir, 1992; Leal, 1993; Maria & Junge, 1993). The results of this study confirm that, even in the middle school grades, high-achieving and low-achieving readers continue to exhibit more difficulty comprehending expository discourse in comparison to narrative discourse.

However, unlike the studies cited above, this study examined the kind of differences that were present between the reader groups on the two text conditions. Several important findings emerged from this study:

1) Even when texts are balanced for comprehension load, both high-achieving and low-achieving readers had more difficulty processing the main ideas in expository discourse in comparison to narrative discourse.

2) Comprehension differences between high-achieving and low-achieving readers were qualitatively similar under both narrative and expository text conditions.

3) Although readers performed equally as well in their ability to extract detail information under both text conditions, comprehension differences between narrative and expository discourse increased with the level of importance of text macrostructures. Readers recalled twice as much of the main idea information from narrative text than they did in the expository text.

Educational Implications

The results of this study pose some important challenges for educators of middle school-aged readers. By the time children reach the middle grades, they are required to use textbook materials regularly. The task of reading becomes the principal means by which new knowledge is acquired in school. Moreover, expository discourse becomes the primary vehicle by which the reader is introduced to this new knowledge. Yet the results of this study indicate that in the middle grades, even high-achieving readers are less sensitive to the main ideas contained in expository materials, even when the comprehension load of the text matches that of narrative discourse. All the readers recognized the detail information adequately in both texts but appeared to have more difficulty recognizing the main ideas in the text.

It is essential that educators be made aware of the added challenges placed on students in middle school, particularly for low-achieving readers. This study showed that middle school-aged readers are eager to learn new material that is presented in the expository genre. Yet less than one third of the readers sampled in this study reported having been taught reading strategies to understand their textbooks.

Changing readers' achievement on reading tasks requires the collaborative efforts of all involved in the education of these middle-level youngsters. Following are a few suggestions to increase the reading success of middle school students.

- Explicitly teach text structures in reading materials by using story maps or story frames (narrative materials), and by identifying the underlying text structures (expository materials) (Vacca and Vacca, 1996).
- Explicitly instruct (and assess) learners identification of the main ideas in expository text.
- When selecting texts, look for elements that signal good expository structures. (e.g., text considerateness, clear headings and organization, physical layout of the pages, coherence, etc.) (Kincade & Pruitt, 1996; Mayer, 1995).
- Give low-achieving readers extended opportunities to develop background knowledge on the topic [e.g., use prereading activities to actively engage readers (Guth, 1992)].

Directions for Future Research

It is essential that educators be made aware of the added challenges placed on readers in the middle school. Middle-level readers are challenged regularly, especially in their content area classrooms, to use expository material to gain new knowledge about the world. Yet even high-achieving readers continue to show difficulty extracting the main ideas in expository materials, and more than two thirds of the readers sampled reported not having been taught reading strategies to understand their textbooks.

Further research is needed to clarify these findings and to understand the reading process more fully. Among the questions that might be asked are: Are the differences between the two genres present when comparing other types of expository discourse (e.g., sequence structures, comparison/contrast structures)? What are the factors influencing narrative and expository differences that have not yet been considered (e.g., the roles of evaluative strategies, temporal elements). The potential for the application of macrostructural analysis to reading research is promising. It should be explored as a tool that may be useful in the development of textbooks, evaluation and screening tests, and other classroom reading, teaching, and assessment materials.

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What's A Researcher, Anyway?[1]

Ellen Adams

ABSTRACT

Using her second grade classroom as a research site, the author describes children's book-talks in a variety of contexts. A strong argument is made for teacher's theories informing practice and practice informing theory making.

I am convinced that there is a new breed of researchers who have a rich source of data at their fingertips everyday. They are called teacher-researchers, and they all have the advantage of gathering data within the context of their own classrooms. Because of their continuing presence in their "research sites," teachers can bring a depth of awareness to their data that outside researchers cannot match. However, there is a cloud of controversy surrounding the teacher- researcher movement. Applebee (1987) submits that "real researchers" bring a rigor to their work that teachers lack. In his view, teachers are imperfect researchers because they are part of the research site and, therefore, they are unable to objectively investigate it. Applebee argues that because teacher-researchers lack pristine research skills, they are really just curious practitioners studying their own students.

Thus, there are those who suggest that a distinction be made between teachers conducting informal inquiries and university-based researchers who use theory-based methods of collecting and analyzing data (Burton, 1985; Hopkins, 1985; Martin, 1984; May, 1982; Studier, 1981). Hubbard and Power (1993) suggest that research is a complicated and messy process which cannot be divided into ordered linear steps. As is the case with all credible research, rigor in teacher-researcher studies comes from careful systematic collection of data. There is a different kind of rigor that has developed in teacher-researcher studies because teacher-researchers build theory through reflection, inquiry, and action. Rather than merely collecting data to support a preconceived hypothesis, teacher-researchers generate their own hypotheses as they actively reflect on the data gathered each day in their busy classrooms. In this paper, I argue that teacher-researchers are not merely curious practitioners; they are researchers in their own right. After giving a brief historical perspective on the notion of teachers as researchers, I discuss some current views on this subject. In the latter part of this paper, I discuss a teacher-researcher study that I conducted in my second grade classroom.

There is documentation as far back as 1908 indicating that teachers were involved in some type of classroom inquiry (Corey, 1953; Stenhouse, 1981), but their work was usually closely supervised by school administrators and university professors. Teachers who conducted research were regarded more as practitioners trained to gather data for others rather than being researchers in the academic sense of the word. In fact, the data generated from teacher-based studies was rarely referred to as "research." By the end of the 1930s, as educational research methods became even more rigorous and scientific, teachers' roles as researchers were diminished (Corey, 1954; Stenhouse, 1981).

The notion of teacher as researcher emerged again in the early 1940s under the more encompassing term "action research" or research conducted by practitioners' whether it be in the field of education, sociology, or psychology (Wann, 1952). However, the primary purpose behind teacher research was to improve individual classroom practice with little emphasis placed on the generation of new educational theories. By the late 1950s, interest in the concept of teachers as researchers faded as university-based researchers questioned the rigorousness of studies conducted by classroom researchers. Many challenged the generalizability of findings from a single classroom to a larger population.

Teachers were not truly viewed as researchers until Stenhouse (1979) first popularized the term "teacher-researchers" in the early 1970s at the Center for Applied Research in Education at the University of East Anglia. The Center promulgated a number of projects which involved both classroom teachers ("internal researchers") and university/college based teams ("external researchers") in the process of gathering and analyzing data from classrooms. Stenhouse argued that rather than teachers being the objects of educational research, they should be the driving force behind it. Stenhouse was particularly concerned with "teacher emancipation" or the creation of individual meaning in a "non-authoritarian context," a context in which teachers felt the freedom to generate their own theories instead of testing and refining the theories of others.

Similarly, Britton (1983) boosted the teacher-researcher movement through his contention that teacher inquiry is a process of discovery and learning, a matter of "looking closely at the stuff of lessons." Britton argued that teacher research was rooted in the everyday experiences of the classroom where theory and practice have a dialectical relationship. It is only when teachers theorize from their own experiences that they can, selectively, learn from the theories from others.

In the 1980s, as it became evident that there was a growing acceptance of qualitative research methods, the teacher-researcher model once again surfaced. A major strand in teacher-researcher studies evolved from the work of Patricia Carini (1979) and her colleagues at the Prospect Archive and Center for Education. Carini conducted the major part of her work in alternative schools with an emphasis on the teachers' roles in the research process.

The majority of teacher-researcher studies conducted thus far have addressed classroom writing at the secondary level. There has also been a respectable number of teacher-researcher studies conducted on the writing process in the elementary grades; however, there have been few studies which have focused on content areas at any level. Moreover, teacher researcher studies have primarily followed a naturalistic paradigm. Explicit in the naturalistic paradigm is the notion that research takes place in the normally functioning classroom. Simmons (1985) suggests that the naturalistic paradigm be used since classrooms are natural sites for observing children. Rather than conducting studies which manipulate conditions solely for the purposes of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), teacher-researcher studies closely watch, listen, and talk with their participants in natural settings without having any preconceived notions of the findings. The driving force behind the data analysis is rooted in the students' perspectives.

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Many wonder whether teacher-researcher studies objectively reflect the perspectives of the students. Knoblauch and Brannon (1988) argue that teacher-researchers must come to terms with the steadfast view of many that research should be detached and objective, a view which they refer to as "the myth of objectivity." Knoblauch and Brannon, among others (Berthoff, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, Elliot, 1991), submit that teacher researchers should be considered as a new breed of researchers who draw on interpretive frameworks built from their own experiences in the classroom. In summary, although the concept has had a long and erratic history, each new cycle of the teacher-researcher movement has brought improvements to the process with the eighties being the decade of a growing acceptance of naturalistic studies. The findings of teacher-researcher studies should be considered as "research" in every sense of the words because they contribute to a growing body of knowledge (Berthoff, 1987; Elliot, 1991; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1993). Moreover, the familiarity that teachers have with their students strengthens, rather than weakens, their studies (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1988). Teacher-researchers are a new genre of researchers who provide a truly insider perspective, making visible the ways in which students and teachers construct knowledge together.

This teacher-researcher study explores the ways in which children talk about books across a number of different contexts. Over the last twenty-two years as an elementary classroom teacher, I have overheard many book related conversations between students which intrigued me. While I have acquired a number of understandings about these student interactions, heretofore I have not always been able to clearly articulate these understandings. Thus, when it came time to begin my doctoral dissertation, I decided to more fully explore my second graders' talk about books in a variety of contexts.

...the familiarity that teachers have with their students strengthens, rather than weakens, their studies...

The theoretical framework for this study is drawn from the work of Barnes (1977) and Britton (1982). In addition to boosting the teacher-researcher movement, Britton's work has also been of central importance in alerting educators to the relationship between talking and learning. He submitted that talk is an important dimension of children's experiences that largely influences their world view and their construction of meanings. Furthermore, Britton argues that conversations between students about books are important in developing a more mature response to literature. Similarly, Barnes (1976) asserts that students must have opportunities to grapple with ideas with their peers if they are to intelligently discuss ideas in teacher-directed large group settings. Barnes calls this groping towards meaning "exploratory talk" and submits that it is one means by which children formulate new ideas. Crucial to Barne's argument is the assumption that private exploratory small-group talk supports forms of learning which would not take place as readily in the more public full class settings.

Talk is an enjoyable activity for most children from infancy on, and it enables children to socially connect with one another as they share the everyday stories of their lives. When children first come to school, they are not novices at conversation; in fact; they are usually quite enthusiastic about being members of a new school community. However, once in school, children soon realize that within the four walls of the classroom, talk becomes much more formal in nature. There is now a new set of rules to which children are expected to conform, and these rules constrain conversational talk in the classroom. For instance, children have to raise their hands, and they mustn't change the subject even if they perceive topic has been exhausted. Also, teachers have many more turns to talk than do students and their turns are noticeably longer.

Within every classroom community, there are many aspects of classroom talk which have yet to be explored. Classrooms across the United States bubble with all kinds of talk every day; however, much of what is communicated between students is not discernable to students. Although there has been a considerable amount of research investigating teacher-student and teacher-class discussions about books, there is a paucity exploring student-student conversations about books; such dialogue could provide valuable insights into what children find important. Although classrooms abound with student-to-student talk about books, these conversations continue to remain an untapped source of data in the fast pace of the classroom.

My second grade classroom is located in a small city school in upstate New York. The K-5 building has a student population of 750 students which includes 31 students with handicapping conditions who are integrated into the regular education classrooms. The building, which is over 70 years old, consists of four floors with all of the administrative offices being located at the north end of the third floor. I have been a second grade teacher in this school system for twenty-three years. During the last few years especially, I have reflected on the ways in which my students talk about books. I have tried to incorporate more time into the school day for the children to have peer group conversations about books. As I immersed myself in the literature, I began to look at my students with a more informed eye and could see that the children were responding to each other in ways which seemed different from their responses during teacher-class discussions. Newkirk and McLure (1992) discuss the "child culture" in every classroom, including their unique habits of thinking and talking about books. I decided that I wanted to tap into these conversations, among others, so that I could learn more about my students' literary understandings. As I watched and observed, I noticed that there were a number of different contexts (i.e., whole-group teacher read alouds, small-group discussions, paired reading and independent reading) for conversations in my classroom. I then decided to audiotape conversations as students participated in these different literacy events. Additionally, the influence of text and reader characteristics within varying contextual situations were considered. All of the tape-recorded conversations were analyzed and coded using categories which evolved from the data during the course of the study. Thus, instead of being restricted to only looking for certain preset categories of talk, as a teacher-researcher, I had the freedom to let the categories of talk naturally unfold. A number of book-related conversations were collected as they took place under natural occurring classroom conditions. Accordingly, the following questions evolved as the focus of my study: (1) What kinds of things did the children talk about during their conversations and discussions about books? (2) How did the conversations change across contexts (child initiated versus teacher initiated conversations, small group versus large group conversations, conversations with peers only versus conversations involving the teacher, etc.)?

...Some readers, especially poorer readers, are more comfortable in smaller, more intimate settings.

I placed tape recorders in a number of different areas of the classroom where it appeared that students most frequently discussed books together. Since this was a naturalistic study, I wanted to keep conditions as natural as possible. Therefore, I didn't ask students to "get close to the tape recorders" or to "speak clearly." Rarely did I even acknowledge the presence of the tape recorders, and after a short time the children paid little attention to them.

It is important to note that my role as both a teacher and a researcher allowed me access to "inside information" about the participants. There were a number of times when important data pertinent to the student was collected during an everyday classroom experience. For instance, on one occasion at lunch time, after reading a story called (Peet, 1971), one of the children was resistant to get in line. After finally getting in line, the child enthusiastically responded to my reprimand with the following "Just start walking Mrs. Adams. I'll catch up. I just want to be a loose caboose!" When incidences such as this occurred, I immediately recorded them in my journal as "spontaneous book-related comments." The journal became a companion to the data collection process because it allowed me to write notes which captured important everyday experiences in addition to analyzing audio-taped conversations about books. Also, I found that the journal was useful for making tentative interpretations. Although nineteen categories of talk were initially generated, a continued analysis resulted in nine core categories of talk (i.e., descriptive, analytical, personal-social, evaluative, general book talk, intertextual, procedural, unrelated). Although it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the categories of talk in depth, let me say that I found that different classroom contexts fostered different kinds of talk. For instance, children engaged in more exploratory talk during paired reading events than was evidenced during other contexts. Also, as the year progressed, children become much more analytical across all contexts. In a future paper I hope to discuss my study in more depth but let me say that it was quite exciting to find that my children had many insightful things to say about books.

As I continued to learn more about children and learning, I came to the conclusion that my study was truly "research" because it contributed to a growing body of knowledge about how children learn. I realized that the familiarity that teacher-researchers have with students strengthens, rather than weakens, their studies (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1980). Stenhouse (1984) argues that the purpose of teacher research is to "create good teaching;" however, he also argues that teacher-researcher studies can enrich the teaching of others to. Thus, I am both a teacher and a theorist.

As a result of conducting this study, I am now a more complete teacher and a more complete researcher. I have learned that these two roles are intertwined. I now know that there are no pat answers or all-inclusive theories that influence my teaching, rather there are many factors which affect the outcome of the teaching and learning that takes place in my room each day. I have learned to be a learner. I want a classroom in which talk about books flourishes because students are able to interact across a number of different settings. When my students come together to talk about books, I want them to experience as many

Katie Joern, Elisa Slein, and Justin Pulver enjoy the world of books.

Photograph courtesy of Sue Clarke and Debby Wiede, Taconic Hills School District different contexts as possible because certain children appear to flourish in different contexts. I have learned that some readers, especially poorer readers, are more comfortable in smaller, more intimate settings. I have also learned that some readers benefit from the collective thinking which takes place during whole class literacy activities. In addition, peer conversations about books brings with it new perspectives that might not transpire otherwise. However, I know that children also need the guidance and the adult perspective of the world that is provided by the teacher.

This study was rooted in the everyday experiences of a community of second graders. It was a study that urged me to think about the child's agenda. Paley (1981) asks all of us to reflect on our own teaching in order to learn more about the child's interpretations of what happens in our classrooms each day. After listening to tapes of herself teaching, Paley found that she unknowingly veered away from the child's agenda during many of her lessons. It's this "search for what matters" that must be the driving force behind every type of research. In this teacher-researcher study I found out what mattered to the books my second graders read each day, and what matters to them matters to me.

I am both a practitioner and a theorist. Each day I continually form theories, testing and revising as I go through my daily interactions with students. Theory informs my practice in the classroom; likewise, classroom practice informs my theory making. I cannot separate my roles as both a teacher and a researcher because the two are intertwined. Nor would I want to do so.

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Thoughts on Affirming Young Children's Literacy Efforts

Mary Shea

ABSTRACT

A critical first step in facilitating children's cognitive development is instilling a belief in themselves as learners. This article illustrates the power of children's beliefs in their preschool literacy activities.

Stories with strong messages of impossible feats being accomplished because someone tried harder and persisted longer are very prevalent in literature [e.g., *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 1930/1954)]. A critically important, yet less often identified, element seems to be a deep belief within the performer that "it can be done and **I can** do it." A strong work ethic coupled with confidence in oneself as a learner will more likely facilitate risk-taking, creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and overall success. The power of positive thinking became very evident to me as a side-effect of research for my dissertation (Shea, 1992).

My research goal was to describe preschool children's (4-5 years-old) understanding of reading and writing. I interacted with the subjects and participated in their classes prior to interviewing them individually. One aspect of the interview involved "reading" environmental print. Enlarged photographs of everyday objects, situations, and places containing embedded print messages were presented to the child. He/she was asked, "Is there something to read in this picture?, Where is there something to read?, What does it say? and How did you know?" Sometimes the response to "What does it say?" was something like, "I don't know; I can't read yet." When this happened, I would give the prompt, "If you asked mommy or daddy or someone who can read what it said, what would they tell you?" Without fail, a response would follow. After a few pictures, the prompt was often unnecessary. Most responses, although not conventionally correct, were identified as meaningful approximations which reflected the use of historical ("I've seen that before at my Grandma's house") or immediate context ("Because it has chocolates right there").

At a private school for the gifted, I met a child who had a wonderful imagination and a flair for dramatics. At free time she often donned props, announced the character she was playing, and directed her own performance. It was obvious that she had a well developed sense of story language and theatrical formats. When this child was asked to read the print messages, her response was an emphatic, "I can't read yet. I'll learn that when I get bigger." Assumably, she perceived this as a fact from messages transmitted to her consciously or unconsciously by others. With such an established viewpoint, wondering about or exploring print, as she does other objects and topics in her world, has been curtailed. She has internalized the opinion that she is incapable of making sense of the printed word before formal instruction.

Prompts were needed two-thirds of the way through the task. All of a sudden she answered the question without a prompt and blurted out, "I didn't know I could read." I pointed out to her, before continuing to the next photo, that she had read all the preceding messages and reads print in the world every day. It was soon apparent that I hadn't realized the enormity of the revelation she had experienced or the personal impact it had made. Suddenly, she slammed her hand down on the table to attract my attention and passionately repeated, "But, I didn't **know** I could read!" Floodgates opened, releasing a spontaneous recognition of what this new-found competency meant in her life. She proceeded to expand on a litany of how this empowered her to become a partner in literate events. Among her comments she noted, "Now **I** can read my *Lyle* [*Lyle the Crocodile* (Weber, 1965)] book to Daddy." The print in the remaining photos was "read" spontaneously and enthusiastically by the subject without the need of further prompts. The *Lyle* interest and confidence in literacy skills carried over into her writing. I believe much different results in writing would have been attained if the subject had not gleaned this insight. Although the writing did not reflect format concepts for mapping print onto the page, it certainly "bubbled with affect and dance" (Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984) in the communication of its meaning. She started with intent, an intent to create something wonderful! We don't have that kind of passion unless we believe in what we have to say and that we can effectively express it to others (see Figure 1). The transformation in this child was very powerful and not fully recognized as a significant moment in her literate life until deeper reflection on the event. I believe this child went forward from the experience forever changed. She'll seek and inquire. She'll direct her own learning, taking responsibility rather than passively waiting until others approve her "readiness."

Figure 1: Dialogue about Lyle

C: This is going to say something interesting.

C: (reading own writing) Lyle went back to his real home not the – in his regular house. He stayed with the owners that were scared about him. I have to write one more thing.

R: (researcher) What did you write there?

C: Can't tell you yet. I just have to draw a little decoration.

C: This says Lyle the crocodile didn't want to stay with his real owners and then he stayed with owners who were scared about him. Lyle the crocodile returned to his scared home because his real owner didn't want him anymore.

Another incident, focused on the language used in the interactional sequence, reinforced the importance of sharing one's confidence in the learner. Instinctively, rather than as a script, I often said to children, "I know you're going to enjoy this activity. I can tell you're a clever boy/girl." Beyond establishing a comfortable rapport with the subjects, I intended to encourage risk-taking by sharing a firm conviction I had about them as learners. One little girl took this very seriously, I assume, from the story her mother later related to me.

I had been asked to talk about research in the area of emergent literacy at an open house at one of the sites in my research. Before the

...the importance of sharing one's confidence in the learner.

meeting, a mother approached me and said that she had a story to tell. She explained that she had a son in first grade who had been reading and writing before he started school. She had been somewhat concerned about her daughter, (subject in my study) because the child had seemed so disinterested in literacy activities. A recent episode just about erased this concern, she said. It seems that, as they were riding in the car, a tractor trailer with print advertising across its width sped past them. The child calmly proclaimed, "Mommy, I know what it says on that truck." Assuming that this was impossible since there were no pictures with the print, but wanting to encourage this interest, the mother asked her what it said. The child responded, "It says mushrooms, mommy." The child was correct! The word mushrooms, along with other words, was boldly printed on the trailer. The mother said that she almost drove off the rode in her astonishment. Upon collecting her composure, she asked the child how she knew the word. Nonchalantly, the child related, "Because Mrs. Shea said I was a clever girl."

The mother and I don't know how this child figured out the word *mushrooms*. Nevertheless, it does indicate to me that when a child believes he/she **can** make sense of print forms, motivation to attend to them is increased. It's in that attending to and "mucking around with" that meaning is constructed. The evolution from the inside out begins and proceeds after the confidence to inquire and explore is firmly established. Perhaps she paid attention to the options on a menu for pizza to be sure she could either have mushrooms or have them excluded. She may have asked about the word and been given a cursory response without anyone taking notice of her inquisitiveness. Although we don't know how she learned the word, her attribution for the source of this knowing is significant. Simple words expressing genuine expectations of capability are powerful and have far reaching effects.

What does this mean for parents and for teachers? How should this affect the models of instructional sequences we use in classrooms? I suggest that we must operate from the stance that "There is a brilliant child locked inside every student" (Collins & Tamarkin, 1995). We, as parents and teachers, are facilitating the unveiling. Cambourne (1988) argues that the most critical condition for learning is expectations; that is, transmitting a belief that learning can and will happen stimulates activities and interactions that ensure success. Cambourne's other conditions (immersion, demonstration, approximation, practice, feedback, and responsibility) are moot unless an inherent vision of the child as a "natural born learner" is guiding them. Letting children know that they have already been successfully engaging in literacy activities encourages them to value the strategies they have acquired. They are more likely to further their understanding. It is imperative that, from the beginning, children trust and value the interpretations they make concerning literacy events and objects in their world, just as they trust conclusions about other matters (Shea, 1992).

Two year old Alexandra Frazer loves Eric Carle's *The Very Quiet Cricket.*

Selectively, children collect patches of knowledge and attitudes which are carefully stitched and patiently arranged as they piece together personal quilts of literacy as uniquely different as snowflakes. To fully appreciate its beauty – to provide children with the fabric they need – we continue to build on our understanding of the work that they are about (Shea, 1992).

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Learning to Read: The Miracle of Language

Elizabeth Stever

ABSTRACT

Just as all children learn to speak their native language, virtually all children can learn to read. This article shows how tutorial instruction in the strategic use of semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cues accelerates one first grade child's reading progress over a three month period.

> "As you are reading these words, you are taking part in one of the wonders of the natural world. For you and I belong to a species with a remarkable ability: we can shape events in each other's brains with exquisite precision... Simply by making noises with our mouths, we can reliably cause precise new combinations of ideas to arise in each other's minds. The ability comes so naturally that we are apt to forget what a miracle it is."
>
> (Pinker, 1994, p.15)

Learning to speak one's native language is by far the most challenging task that humans ever accomplish. Despite immense cognitive demands and complex physical coordination, most children easily master the articulation and structure of their language by age three and one half. This feat is possible because language is a uniquely human ability encoded in our genes (Lieberman, 1991; Pinker, 1994). Children are born with the capacity to learn to speak even if given limited exposure to language.

Two unique abilities allow humans to communicate complex thoughts efficiently: rapid speech processing and syntax. While short term memory for nonspeech sounds is limited to seven to nine items per second (Miller, 1956), speech sounds can be processed three times that speed at an astonishing fifteen to twenty-five sounds per second (Lieberman, 1991). For example, this sentence contains approximately fifty speech sounds. All fifty sounds can be communicated in two seconds, but, if transmitted at the nonspeech rate, a listener would forget the beginning before hearing the end of the sentence (Lieberman, 1991). This rapid speech processing evolved over the last 200,000 years as organs that were originally used for breathing and swallowing were adapted to produce human speech. Brain functions also evolved to facilitate the extremely precise muscular coordination needed for speech production. To articulate a single sound, lips and tongue must coordinate their respective positions as the larynx releases exactly the right amount of air. These specialized anatomical structures and brain mechanisms allow humans to produce and decode speech signals in a highly efficient manner (Lieberman, 1991).

Human syntax also circumvents the limitations of short term memory. Three one-thought sentences can be combined to convey more information. For example, "The boy is small: the boy has a hat: the hat is red" becomes "The small boy has a red hat." This integration of information in a syntactically precise way permits rapid communication of complex thoughts (Lieberman, 1991). Even very young children appear to utilize their emerging knowledge of syntax. Eighteen-month-old children can comprehend the distinctions conveyed by the prepositions on and under. When shown animated cartoons of a bear on a table and a bear under a table with a synchronized message, "Look at the bear running on the table," youngsters consistently look more often at the correct cartoon (Hirsch-Pasek, Naigles, Golinkoff, L.R. Gleitman & H. Gleitman, 1988). Once children understand the rudiments of syntax, they rapidly expand their vocabulary in what has been called a "naming explosion" (Bloom, 1973; Brown, 1973).

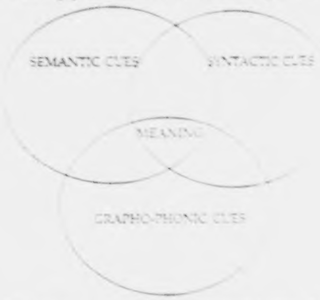
Linguists differentiate learning to talk from cultural inventions like the alphabet. Pinker (1994) suggests that while there is a biological ability for speaking, reading depends on knowledge of an alphabet which must be learned through direct instruction. To the extent that oral language knowledge can be shown to impact reading acquisition, reading can be viewed as a natural learning process. The purpose of this paper is to show the nature of reading acquisition and its heavy dependence on oral language knowledge.

The Reading Process

The reading process consists of three interconnected cuing systems (see Figure 1). Semantic cues refer to the meaning of the text or what would make sense. Proficient readers utilize their background knowledge to anticipate upcoming words and events that would be meaningful.

Figure 1: The Three Cueing Systems

The reading process can be viewed diagrammatically:



Any one area cannot exist in isolation from others if comprehension is to be maximized.

(Routman, 1994)

Predicting based on meaning and syntax...means eliminating unlikely alternatives.

Syntactic cues are the structure and grammar signals that help the reader predict logical word order and determine what sounds right. Taken together semantic and syntactic cues are powerful sources for utilizing the context of a message whether it is spoken or written. Grapho-phonic cues are the letter-sound relationships that our alphabetic system of writing uses to communicate messages. Meaning and syntax are essentially language systems, while grapho-phonic information refers to the print (Lyons, Pinnell & Deford, 1993).

Grapho-phonic information is an integral part of the reading process, but it is subordinate to semantic and syntactic cues. Phonics proficiency alone cannot ensure comprehension of a text (Routman, 1994). For example, while most first graders could read Shakespeare's immortal lines "To be or not to be. That is the question," they would not understand the significance of the statement. More than being able to pronounce words, reading requires interpretation based on background knowledge (Zierler, 1991). Thus, emergent readers must not only learn the alphabet to make use of important grapho-phonic cues, but they must also build upon their knowledge of the world (i.e., semantic cues) and oral language knowledge (i.e., syntactic cues) in order to become competent readers. Good readers use the visual information in print to **check** the predictions they make based on meaning and syntax. Using the context to anticipate upcoming ideas and words makes it necessary to sample only a minimum of the visual information available, greatly facilitating the comprehension process.

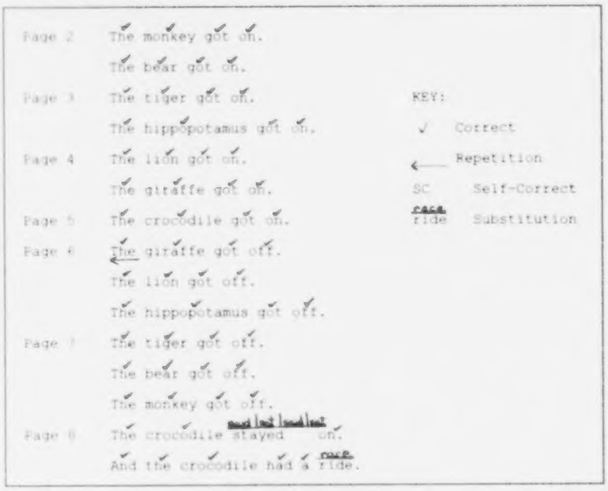
Reading Instruction

Prior to reading a new book, the teacher and child can preview the pictures to familiarize the child with the plot and difficult language features. This introduction varies according to the needs of the child and characteristics of the text, providing the oral language and visual support a child may need to be successful on the first reading of a new text (Clay, 1991b).

Emergent readers need to be encouraged to apply prior knowledge and internalized syntactic principles during reading. Teachers can facilitate the use of context as a support for predicting and confirming unknown words by prompting, "What makes sense?" or "What sounds right?" Predicting based on meaning and syntax does not mean guessing the word that will occur; it means eliminating unlikely alternatives. The remaining possibilities can then be examined in light of the visual information available (Clay, 1991a). Only after the reader examines the context of a word will grapho-phonic cues be meaningful. For example, when a child tries to sound out the word "party" into discrete phonemes the result is distorted /p/, /ae/, /r/, /t/, /y/. If encouraged to first predict what would make sense and sound right, the child has the real word "party" to connect with the letters and sounds, yielding /p/, /ar/, /t/, /e/. Going from the anticipated word to the letter represented in that word respects the principle that learning proceeds from the known to the unknown. "When children start with real words and what they know, they can better hold the sound and connect it to a letter in their minds" (Routman, 1994, p.149). Visual cross-checking used in conjunction with meaning and syntax is a highly efficient reading behavior.

Bruner (1986) uses the term "scaffold" to connote the temporary nature of teacher support during instruction. The following oral reading records taken over a three month period show how one first grader learned to integrate semantic, syntactic and visual information with teacher guidance. Ranked by her classroom teacher in late February as one of the weakest readers in the class, Delilah had not yet learned to make efficient use of language and print cues. She was targeted for early reading intervention support and began daily tutorial instruction. Figure 2 shows Delilah's tentative use of context and initial consonant to read for meaning in a predictable text. While her attempts were not correct, they reveal Delilah's knowledge of syntax (i.e., correct placement of verb and noun), her use of meaning (picture cues), and her awareness of the importance of beginning sounds. I affirmed Delilah's thoughtful problem solving, saying "In the picture it looks like he sat right down on the horse, doesn't it? But, could that word be sat? Check it." As soon as Delilah looked beyond the initial consonant, she acknowledged that the word couldn't be sat. I further prompted, "Could it be stayed? Do you think he stayed on?" With this word in mind, Delilah was able to segment the phonemes /s/, /t/, /a/, /d/ and confirm the prediction.

Figure 2: Oral Reading Record of The Merry-go-round (Cutting, 1988)

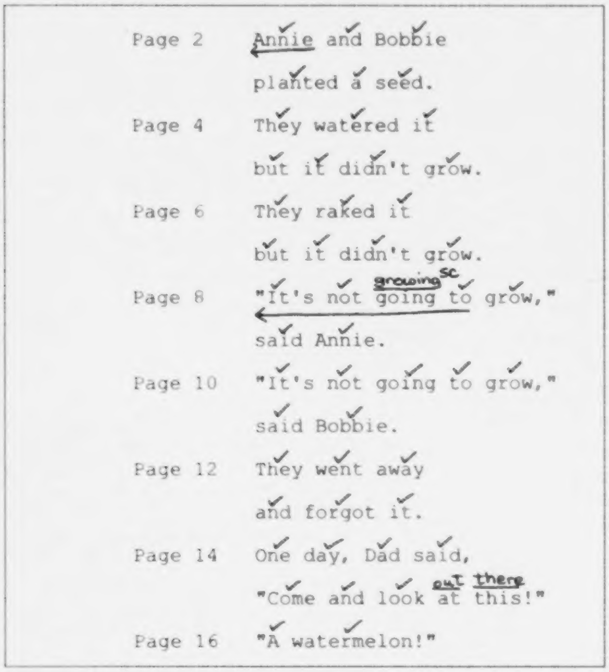


Page 2 The monkey got on.
The bear got on.
Page 3 The tiger got on.
The hippopotamus got on.
Page 4 The lion got on.
The giraffe got on.
Page 5 The crocodile got on.
Page 6 The giraffe got off.
The lion got off.
The hippopotamus got off.
Page 7 The tiger got off.
The bear got off.
The monkey got off.
Page 8 The crocodile [illegible] stayed on.
And the crocodile had a race ride.

KEY:
✓ Correct
← Repetition
SC Self-Correct
race ride Substitution

Figure 3, an oral reading record taken one month later, shows the beginning of self-initiated cross-checking of cues. Delilah read, "It's not growing to...," realized that "growing to grow" was not semantically and syntactically acceptable and immediately went back to the beginning of the sentence to reread, "It's not going to grow." Later I asked Delilah to show me where she did some good reading work in the book. She quickly turned back and pointed to the line where she self-corrected. I praised her independent monitoring and successful use

Figure 3: Oral Reading Record of The Seed (Cowley, 1987a)



Page 2 Annie and Bobbie
planted a seed.
Page 4 They watered it
but it didn't grow.
Page 6 They raked it
but it didn't grow.
Page 8 growing SC
"It's not going to grow,"
said Annie.
Page 10 "It's not going to grow,"
said Bobbie.
Page 12 They went away
and forgot it.
Page 14 One day, Dad said,
out there
"Come and look at this!"
Page 16 "A watermelon!"

of context and verbalized her strategic use of semantic and syntactic cues, saying "It's not growing to grow didn't sound right to you, did it? I like the way you reread that sentence so that it sounded right and made sense."

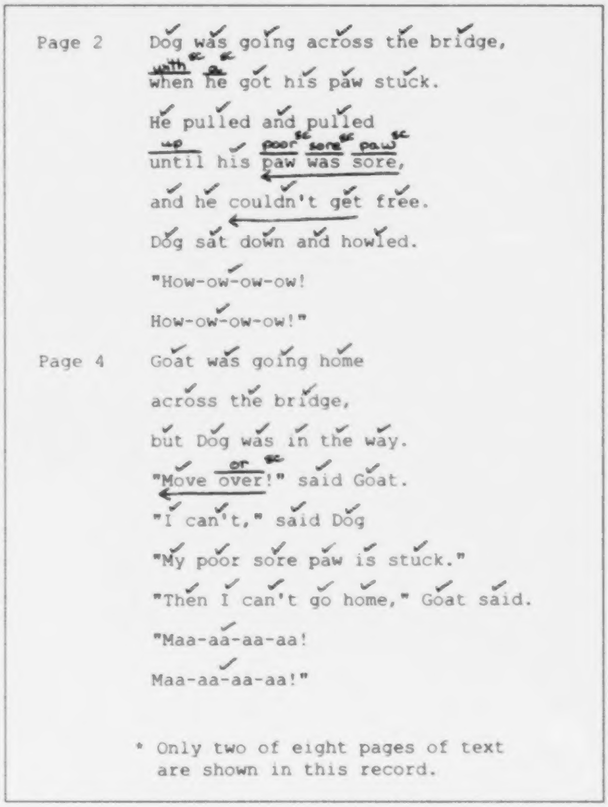
I continued to support Delilah's independent problem solving with three key questions: Does that make sense? Does that sound right? Does that look right? Figure 4, taken two months later, reveals that she has internalized these problem solving behaviors. Delilah's fluent reading and consistent self-correcting indicate that she can independently problem-solve during reading. Gradually Delilah became adept at articulating her own use of the three cuing systems and no longer needed the scaffold of my strategy questions.

Phonics in Perspective

A child's discovery of the alphabetic principle is a major milestone in learning to read. Phonemic awareness has been shown to be a dependable predictor of later reading achievement (Griffith & Olson, 1992). *Becoming a Nation of Readers* concludes, "Thus, the issue is no longer... whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done" (Anderson, Herbert, Scoll & Wilkinson, 1985, pp. 36-37). Writing appears to be an ideal place to provide direct instruction in phonics. Clay (1993) suggests that children practice many of the skills of reading when they write. As children attempt to encode words, they must listen carefully for the order of sounds since our system of writing maps letters to phonemes.

Teachers can provide direct instruction in hearing sounds in words during writing activities. The use of Elkonin boxes is an effective procedure to help children break a word apart and associate the sound with a letter. The teacher draws boxes ☐☐☐, slowly articulates a word and encourages the child to fill in the letters for the sounds heard |s|a|t|, supplying any letters the child does not hear (Clay, 1993). Later, during reading, children can be prompted to utilize this ability to segment sounds as they cross-check meaning and syntax with visual information. This supported writing was part of Delilah's daily tutorial lesson, building her phonic skills and strengthening the reading/writing connection. Figure 5 shows Delilah's progress in hearing sound sequences during writing.

Figure 4: Oral Reading Record of The Sore Paw (Cowley, 1987b)



Page 2 Dog was going across the bridge,
with SC a SC
when he got his paw stuck.
He pulled and pulled
up poor SC sore SC paw SC
until his paw was sore,
and he couldn't get free.
Dog sat down and howled.
"How-ow-ow-ow!
How-ow-ow-ow!"
Page 4 Goat was going home
across the bridge,
but Dog was in the way.
or SC
"Move over!" said Goat.
"I can't," said Dog
"My poor sore paw is stuck."
"Then I can't go home," Goat said.
"Maa-aa-aa-aa!
Maa-aa-aa-aa!"

* Only two of eight pages of text are shown in this record.

Figure 5: Recording of Writing Process

March 13	|g|o|t|	1 2
April 26	|m|o|u|s|e|	1 2 3
April 26	|t|w|i|n|s|	1 2 3 4 5

* The numbers represent the sounds that Delilah was able to hear and write without assistance.

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Conclusion

Thanks to the redundancy of reading cues, yxx cxn xndxrstxnd whxt x xm wrxtxng xvxn xf x rxplxcx xll thx vxwxls wxth xn "x" (Pinker, 1994). Your use of semantic and syntactic knowledge enables you to read this sentence. Clearly, it only makes sense in beginning reading instruction to help children utilize innate language cues. This emphasis does not imply that phonics and decoding are incidental parts of beginning reading instruction; rather the focus is on integrating phonics with powerful language cues.

In three months Delilah went from being one of the weakest readers in her class to functioning strongly at the average level. Her growth as a reader reveals how reading progress can be accelerated with instructional support that capitalizes on language strengths.

Dr. Elizabeth Forbes Stever is a reading consultant for the Watertown City School District and an adjunct faculty member at Potsdam College. She is active is staff development on many educational issues including classroom assessment, early intervention, integrated language arts, and multicultural education. She thanks Mary Melara, ESOL teacher in the Indian River School District, for her thoughtful suggestions about this manuscript.

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Campaign for World Literacy

The Developing Countries Fund offers financial support for literacy projects in the developing world and provides an avenue for you and your council to get involved with IRA's Campaign for World Literacy. The time has come to make stronger efforts to support the lifelong reading habit worldwide.

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Support the Fund today!

[illegible]

Project Love International
–a hands-on global education project engaging U.S. students and teachers in addressing the educational issues of developing countries.

Language to Literacy in Belize
–a pilot project of literature-based reading instruction, adopted by the Ministry of Education for eventual implementation on a nationwide basis.

Reading for Understanding
–a project developed by the Soros Foundation in conjunction with the Romanian Reading Association, aimed at literacy development in Europe and utilizing IRA volunteers.

Formation of national affiliates
–most recently the Guatemala Reading Association, an affiliate now planning a January 1997 language arts conference in the Latin American region.

INTERNATIONAL
Reading Association

Project HOPE: A Collaborative Literacy Effort for Urban Youth

Mary Rearick

ABSTRACT

This article describes a successful summer literacy project. The motivating features of the program are parental and community involvement, culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, and a constructivist approach for learning to read.

Urban communities worry about their African American and Latino students' motivation to learn and perform in school. Failure on state-mandated tests, alarming school drop out rates, and poor to minimal basic skills constitute reasons for community concern (Green, 1993). This participatory research study describes Project HOPE, an urban community-based, summer school program for youth. This paper portrays the environment of Project HOPE which supports the learning of African American and Hispanic youth.

Schools can improve the education of urban minority children by developing comprehensive services, culturally congruent practices, as well as family and community connections. Comprehensive services can be provided: nutrition, care, resources for the development of healthy habits and positive attitudes (Parks, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Educators can become more familiar with the expectations and values of the families and communities in which the children live (Heath, 1983, Ladson-Billings, 1994; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Finally, educators can establish classrooms which are culturally and linguistically appropriate and which contribute to urban youths' sense of identity (Bartholome, 1994; Delpit, 1988, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ladson-Billings & King, 1990; Noblit, 1993). The consistent message in all such research is that the urban schools which are most effective cultivate family and neighborhood bonds, offer hope, nurture students' natural desire to learn as well as their sense of belonging (Banks, 1995). While educators have given urban parents much advice about how to prepare their children for school (Allen, Michalove & Shockley, 1995; Edwards, 1992; Nuckolls, 1991), a paucity of research exists on the parental and community efforts to improve the motivation and performance of their children. Given the magnitude of the problem, it is extremely important that educational researchers and teachers learn from the parent and community programs that work. As Zora Neale Hurston (1937/1978) once wrote, "To know there, you have to go there" (p. 285). That is what I did.

Hartford, Connecticut is a contradictory setting. It is the corporate headquarters for major businesses, yet inner city residents earn the lowest per capita income in the state. The Hartford School System has 4% of the State's public school students, 40% of its bilingual students, and 16% of its special education students. Moreover, it has consistently had the highest percentage of students below the remedial standards since the inception of the State Mastery Testing in 1985. In the fall of 1995, only 9% of the secondary-level students passed the competency tests. Of the 6425 students who entered grades 9 through 12 during the 1991-1992 school year, 640 (10%) dropped out of school, and an additional 701 (10.6%) were retained in grade. Over a four year period, almost 50% of the students dropped out. With approximately 75% of the students considered at-risk of not obtaining the skills necessary for gainful employment or post-secondary study, concerned parents, members of the community, and educators took action (Hartford School Goals 2000 Grant, 1994-5).

In the summer of 1995, I participated in an inquiry project with many of Project HOPE's parents and teachers. We investigated the motivational aspects of the program. A participatory research design (Reason, 1994) enabled members of the team to collect, organize, analyze, and reflect on data from many sources, including their own perspectives. The team gathered information on curriculum content, learning process, instructional arrangements, and assessment practices. Sources of data included interviews with the parent coordinator, parent director, academic coordinator, teachers, assistant teachers, and children. Thirty on-site ethnographic observations were conducted, and policy manuals, newspaper articles, and materials were examined.

The Project HOPE program took place in a mixed and middle-income urban neighborhood school where the teachers had access to the lounge, the gymnasium, and six classrooms. The faculty lounge became the cafeteria, meeting hall, and office for the summer program. The only information posted on the lounge bulletin board were the goals and the rules for the summer program. Everything in the school was put away for the summer; cabinets and bulletin boards were covered with newspaper. Although the surroundings were uninspiring, dismal even, the parents were grateful for the space.

The coordinators and parents selected the staff for Project HOPE. All teachers had successfully taught urban children; these educators included one African American male, one African American female, one Hispanic female, and three European American females. In addition, there were assistant teachers in each classroom; three African American males, one Hispanic female, and two African American females.

...Urban schools which are most effective cultivate family and neighborhood bonds...

Project HOPE, an entirely voluntary program, was available to all city children. Families learned about the program in a variety of ways. For example, Welcome Community Health Services, a community-based social service agency, initially offered literacy programs in area churches, and many of the assistant teachers in Project HOPE earned their degrees in those Graduate Equivalency Degree and/or Parents as First Teachers programs (Villalobos, 1994; West, 1994). Graduates of those programs enrolled their children in Project HOPE. In addition, Welcome Community Services also developed afternoon tutorial programs for children in some Hartford Schools. Children and parents heard about summer programs through those networks. The program was also advertised in the *Hartford Courant*. However, the program was mainly advertised by word of mouth.

In late August, the program received favorable reviews by the children, who revealed their satisfaction with the homelike environment.

> When I, Corey, came to Project HOPE, I felt like it was my house. After the second day, I met a lot of friends. My classmates and my teacher was (sic) nice and really made me feel good about myself. After I checked around the school, I just new (sic) it would be a good school. Next year, I hope we have a summer program because it taught me a lot.

Moreover, surveys completed by regular school teachers in October and May of the academic year 1995-1996 indicated that the children who had attended Project HOPE programs were more organized and engaged in schooling:

> The students who attended Project HOPE improved their vocabulary. They can now identify short and long vowels and improved their decoding skills in general. Some of the students are in the bilingual program here at school. They definitely benefitted from the Project HOPE summer program because it encouraged them to apply their knowledge of English in the classroom work and social activities. The students in my class have shown a change in attitude toward school. They are happy to stay. They are punctual. They are asking for more schooling.

In addition, on-site achievement test results indicated that children from Project HOPE made gains. During the initial evaluation of the program when participants were asked: "What motivates children to want to learn in Project HOPE?," respondents listed these motivating factors:

- The school was safe.
- The curriculum gave the children a chance to master basic skills.
- The instruction was tailored to the needs of the individual child.
- The teachers were excellent diagnosticians.

In October 1995, when we reviewed the initial evaluation of our summer program and reflected on research of similar programs, we realized that the effects of the program were more far-reaching than those described in the literature (Irvine, 1989, 1990; Levine, 1994; Stickland & Asher, 1992). Project HOPE created a positive, inclusive, and nurturing environment – one which attended to the children's need for mastery and for developing a sense of control over their learning.

Community-building was a central tenet in the educative process. Initial planning for Project HOPE occurred formally at Welcome Community Services and informally at community gatherings in a church basement or at the school. At formal planning meetings, the philosophy, goals, and objectives of the program were mapped out. Three threads emerged from those conversations: first, parents wanted to nurture the children's natural desire to learn; second, parents wanted the children to choose to perform in school; third, parents wanted to help the children master the skills needed for self-directed learning.

Community focus was clear: to create spaces where people could feel comfortable discussing common issues and making decisions regarding their children's well-being. For example, one goal was to provide a safe, drug-free environment for the children. Parents and members of the community talked about these issues informally. The parent coordinator and a local political representative drafted a notice to parents inviting them to attend a meeting to address some stories the children related about community problems, particularly those having to do with fears about drugs and violence. The problems were distracting the children from learning so the Parent Director created a newsletter to communicate concerns and plans. She used literacy to address real community problems and to advocate for the children.

At formal meetings, parents and members of the community addressed a second set of concerns. They defined the curriculum for the program, focusing on the development of the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. Project HOPE goals were to:

- Attend to the children's basic needs, providing breakfast and lunch.
- Provide a healthy balance between work and play.
- Establish a schedule that fit the children's developmental rhythms.

All children received two and a half hours of academic instruction Monday through Thursday – 45 minutes of writing, 45 minutes of math, and 60 minutes of reading. In addition, the children enjoyed two and a half hours of recreation and the arts. On Fridays, the children who had attended school all week enjoyed cultural events, such as storytelling in the park, museum visits, concerts, and hikes. Academic class sizes were kept small. Five or six children from each grade level received academics in the morning, while the other five or six children from that grade level enjoyed arts and crafts and recreation activities. Those groups flip-flopped in the afternoon. Since the class sizes in arts and crafts and recreation were large and heterogeneous, teachers designed activities that enhanced cooperation among the children.

The coordinators, parents, and teachers wanted the children to master learning strategies, including thinking and problem-solving, as well as literacy-related and arithmetic skills which are needed to function optimally in the community and in school. Therefore, they organized the space, tasks, and instruction in ways that encouraged the children to take responsibility for planning the schedule, requesting assistance from either teachers or peers, explaining their thinking, and developing the learning community.

Project HOPE did not have a budget for materials so the leaders used materials found in the community – bus schedules, newspapers, advertisements, grocery store pamphlets, posters, flyers, catalogues, and telephone books. The parents felt that in using such materials, the children were learning how to make sense of the literacy they saw every day in the city. Because parents believed that the children should learn to read materials that would help them get and hold a job, they used occupational-related materials – manuals, schedules, time and task sheets, and rules and regulations. They also used curriculum materials that schools had discarded (e.g., skills series like Barnell Loft). Those materials were used in an adult literacy program called, "Together We Can," which many of the parents had attended; therefore, they believed that such publications were useful tools for learning decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Many Project HOPE parents also participated in a "Parents as First Teachers" program, and they felt that reading books aloud helped children learn vocabulary and school-related language. They preferred nonfiction books. Many members of this particular group of parents simply did not read other genres such as fiction, fairy tales, or science fiction. They were interested in practical matters. However, they did arrange to have the Bookmobile come to the school once each week. The teachers felt that having access to books and magazines was a vital part of the literacy program. When the children talked about the pictures, they extended their knowledge and developed language and vocabulary. When they listened to the teacher share information from the text, they learned new concepts. When the teacher modeled comprehension strategies, activating knowledge, predicting and confirming, inferring, and summarizing, the children learned how effective readers read texts.

The classroom environment was designed to help the children develop organizational, learning, and self-monitoring strategies. Each child received an individualized folder in which the student and/or teacher placed reading, writing, and math activity sheets, which were selected from teacher resource books. Upon entering the classroom, each child reviewed the tasks in the individualized folder, then decided in what order and with what help he or she would complete the work. The teacher did not impose the order on the children; rather he or she waited for the children to request help. Students self-corrected all of their work using the teacher's answer book. If they made errors, they corrected them to 100%. They kept track of their progress on check lists in their folders. The folder system was designed to give the children ownership and a sense of control and responsibility for managing time and learning tasks.

> ...Give the children ownership and a sense of control and responsibility for managing time and learning tasks.

Project HOPE involved children in the curriculum planning and implementation process. Upon entering the program, each child received an individualized program based on a personal assessment. In a diagnostic session, a teacher evaluated each child's baseline knowledge using interviews with the student and careful observations of their performance during instructional activities. They wrote a diagnostic profile on each child. The teachers interviewed the children about their expectations, interests, strengths, and struggles as learners; thereafter, they jointly formulated an individualized learning plan. Together they decided if additional testing needed to be done. The students and teachers established mastery learning objectives in reading, writing, and arithmetic. During daily conferences, the teacher listened as the child either explained what was learned or shared his/her observations with the child. At the conference the child and teacher reviewed the daily work, and the child described specific procedures which he or she used and identified problem areas. During the conference, the teacher noted the child's logic and strategies. The teacher shared his/her notes with the child, and together they set objectives and selected tasks for the following day.

Parents were welcomed into the program in a variety of ways. On Fridays when the children enjoyed cultural events, the assistant teachers, parent volunteers, or members of the community provided supervision. This left the teachers free to plan, locate instructional resources, write assessments, and/or meet with parents. Parents and members of the community were welcome to visit the classrooms anytime.

Generally, the school day began and ended with a meeting. During the morning meeting the children reviewed their goals for the day and decided how to accomplish the daily work. They scheduled tutorials and conferences with the teacher or assistant teacher and planned whole group instructional sessions. At the end of the day meeting, the children and teacher discussed their accomplishments and any issues that came up during the day. The purpose of those meetings was to maintain open lines of communication and to develop a sense of classroom community.

Teacher-directed lessons were kept to a minimum, but they did occur. In the kindergarten and first grade classroom they occurred when the teacher was introducing letters, numbers, or reading a book. In the intermediate classroom, they occurred when the students requested help writing stories. The coordinators and parents maintained that the abilities to identify letters, spelling patterns, and whole words were critical factors in learning how to read; therefore, they taught them directly and explicitly. They maintained that the children would be more inclined to remember isolated skills if they could see how they are used in everyday contexts. In addition, the parents wanted the children to use their emerging literacy skills in meaningful and personal ways.

The following example demonstrates mastery teaching in a primary-level classroom. The teacher developed a routine which helped the kindergarten children to use their knowledge of language to become literate. First, she began with a familiar story, one which was used to introduce the letter Ll. Then she introduced a new letter, the Kk. The children practiced writing the letter, knowing that when they finished the activity, they would get a snack and hear a story about Kelly Kiss. The teacher was very explicit in her instruction, teaching the children how to follow directions, attend, talk through their thinking as they wrote each letter, and connect the sound and letter symbol. Then she embedded the isolated skill knowledge in a meaningful context. She invited the children to compose a group story. The instructional strategies gave the children multiple opportunities to identify letters and sounds, use them in language, and see and hear them in stories. Later in the day, when the teacher and the assistant met with the children in individual conferences, the teachers assessed the effectiveness of the instruction as the children reviewed the work of the day.

During tutorials the teachers listened to children and adapted their responses to meet the needs, style, and point of view of the child. In tutorial sessions, the teachers demonstrated role-taking ability that is essential for participation in school settings. In fact, they mediated the learning during those conversations. An example that follows demonstrates how the female European American teacher tutored a girl, and a second example illustrates how the assistant teacher, a male African

American high school student, tutored a boy. Note the difference in style of communication used by the teacher and the assistant teacher.

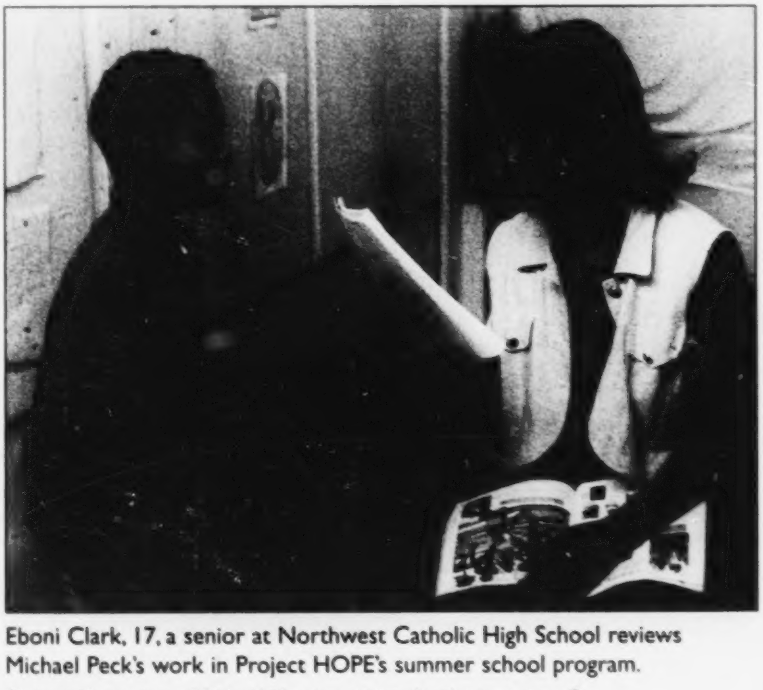
> *The teacher facilitated the learning by posing a series of questions.*
>
> **T:** *So you went to New York. How did you get there?*
>
> **S:** *By plane, we took a plane from Logan Airport.*
>
> **T:** *You saw a movie?*
>
> **S:** *I saw the movie, "Bingo."*
>
> **T:** *Oh, I haven't seen that one yet. Could you tell me more about that movie?*
>
> *The teacher and student continued that approach until they finished the story. The teacher asked questions and, as the student responded, the teacher made notes in the margin of the child's paper. Later, the child used the notes to write a second draft of the paper.*
>
> *The assistant teacher conferred with a young male student. They were laughing and joking as they worked together on the story.*
>
> **T:** *There was a WHAT? on the table?*
>
> **S:** *There was chinaware?*
>
> **T:** *What's that?!!*
>
> **S:** *You know, man, they was gonna eat with the chinaware.*
>
> **T:** *Oh, chinaware. Is that some kind of silverware?*
>
> **S:** *No, silly, it's china, it's a set of dishes.*
>
> **T:** *Oh, you mean there was a set of dishes on the table! Well, why didn't you say that!!! So, tell me, man, what'd your dishes look like?*
>
> *The assistant teacher read the child's story, stopping periodically to coax the child to elaborate. The friendly banter continued until the child improved the story; then the assistant teacher wrote down the changes in the margin of the paper. It was almost as if they were playing a game of riddles.*

In all of the classrooms, children had opportunities to experience diverse interpersonal and communicative styles. By and large, the teachers used standard English and guided learning through questions and answers, and the assistant teachers used the community dialect and guided the learning by making comparisons which linked the new concepts to the child's existing ones. Both the teachers and the assistant teachers used the web and the questions introduced during the whole-class collaborative writing activity to help the children organize and develop their stories. In both cases, the students were engaged in the activity.

Urban children sometimes form peer cultures which do not place a value on academics, and they sometimes resist teachers' efforts to teach them. Yet this was not the case at Project HOPE. There was an ethos for learning, and the children responded favorably to the style the teachers used. They formed relationships around accomplishing literacy tasks.

The Project HOPE curriculum enabled the children to draw on their personal histories without intruding on their privacy. The teachers and students in the intermediate classroom used collaborative writing to develop literacy skills and a sense of community. In selecting the subject matter and constructing the criteria for the story together, the students were able to have some control over the way they used literacy. In meeting individually with the teachers and getting an opportunity to talk and to relate to the teachers, they developed social skills. The public sharing of the children's writing helped them discover commonalties that cut across their diverse experiences. Shared literacy provided the link between students and teachers and among students in this program.

Project HOPE created a rich context for learning. Members of the religious, political, and educational communities worked together to create a social space and a curriculum which enabled people to develop a sense of personal identity, perform valued roles in the group, and master basic skills. The children participated in planning their goals, making decisions, and solving problems together. Routines were established in ways that enabled them to see connections between mastery learning tasks and functional use of literacy. Moreover, students completed projects which were a source of personal and community pride, and they enjoyed reciprocal relationships with peers and teachers.



Eboni Clark, 17, a senior at Northwest Catholic High School reviews Michael Peck's work in Project HOPE's summer school program.

Photograph courtesy of Richard Messina; reprinted with permission of The Hartford Courant.

Conclusion

Three factors contributed to the enhancement of learning at Project HOPE. First, the social context was humane and supportive of academic learning. Members of the community, including parents, were visible in planning, implementing, and evaluating the children's educational program. Material resources were scarce, so the Coordinator focused on human resources. Members of the community worked with the coordinators to access money, materials, and food for the children and to address social issues that undermined their performance. "Together we can!" was the coordinator's motto. I learned through interviews that many of the same people who offer the summer school program, also offer after-school programs at urban schools. Although not formally recognized as educators by the school system, they form an important informal network. Second, policies and practices in Project HOPE were culturally relevant and culturally rich. Members of the community taught alongside certified teachers, simultaneously offering the students two styles of communication. Finally, the curriculum and instruction demonstrated a respect for the whole person, offering children opportunities to develop body, spirit, and mind.

Project HOPE's approach to schooling is transformative and democratic. No one social or cultural group possesses all knowledge. Knowledge and expertise may be demonstrated differently by different groups of people and in different contexts. The Coordinator of Project HOPE had not read any of the research on motivation, but she understood how to create a humane environment where members of diverse communities could work together to provide urban, minority children with food, resources, and opportunities for learning. Speaking at one graduation, she looked out over the audience and said, "I am full of pride when I look over this crowd. I see doctors, lawyers, and teachers in this crowd. Your learning has just begun! Let's continue learning!" (West, 1994).

> **...including parents ...in planning, implementing, and evaluating the children's educational program.**

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The Culture of Families and the Building of School-Home Connections

Sema Brainin

ABSTRACT

The nature and causes of the decline in school-home partnerships as well as the alienation of families at the low end of the economic spectrum are explored in this article. A guide for families, *Ten Ways to Support your Children's Learning*, is presented as an exemplar, offering an approach that enlists the culture and life of the home to enrich the efforts of the school. This guide is effective both as a preservice and inservice teacher training tool.

Recently while attending a conference, I encountered a parent activist who was attending another meeting at the same Conference Center. I recognized her immediately as a participant in a Head Start parent group I had led some five years ago. Delighted with our mutual recognition, and reminiscing about those days, she exclaimed, "How could I forget you? The guide we wrote is still on my refrigerator! What we did gave me the confidence to be **here**." Since Head Start funding depended on full attendance, getting children to attend consistently was a crucial issue. Parents had shared their **own** strategies for mobilizing their children and households each morning and produced a list that was welcomed by all as comprehensive and realistic

Reuniting with one of the parent authors, now a leader in her community, underscored, once more, the wealth we uncover when we enlist parents' own wisdom to solve problems related to their children's education. Moved by the seemingly great impact of this modest accomplishment, I saw again the power of asking the simple question, "What do you already know...?"

This incident suggests a guiding philosophy for the training programs we develop to prepare future teachers to become partners with families on behalf of the children they nurture in common, a philosophy that values the knowledge and experience of parents and other caregivers as we seek their support for their children's learning. Recent research illuminates this and the related issues that need to be addressed as we seek to strengthen school-home connections.

- Family involvement in children's education is truly beneficial to their achievement (Epstein, 1992; Henderson, 1987).
- The patterns of such involvement suffer a continuing decline after children reach fourth grade (Carnegie Commission on Adolescent Development, 1989).
- Changing families and communities, particularly in poor urban settings, render obsolete many of the traditional expectations and formats of family involvement and call upon us to forge new approaches (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).
- The preparation of preservice teachers who have understanding and competencies in parent-teacher collaboration is almost nonexistent in schools of teacher education (Foster & Loven, 1992).

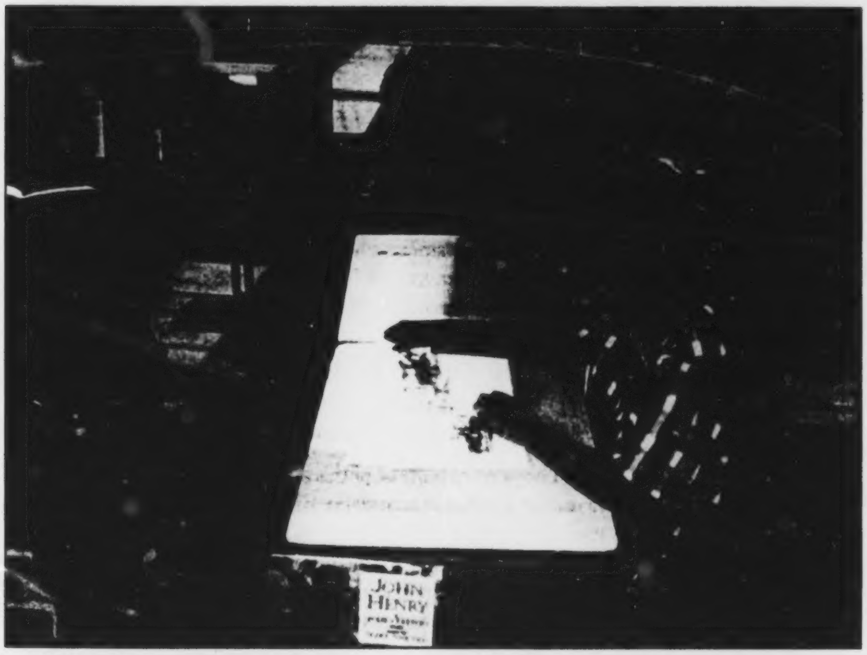
The primary purpose of this article is to address the above deficit in teacher training in accordance with the relevant social realities. The particular tool featured is a guide created for use by teachers and schools, *Ten Ways to Support Your Children's Learning*. Especially designed for parents and caregivers of upper elementary and middle school learners, it was developed during my work as an educator in New York City's urban communities. My own use of the guide has included work with families in community education as well as with present and future educators in a teacher training program at Hunter College (City University of New York).

The guide encapsulates a philosophy of learning and an approach to intentioned adults that assumes the value of learners' prior knowledge. It also echoes the themes of New York State's *A New Compact for Learning* (1992) and of current programs for school reform that strive for a unity of purpose between schools and families (Comer, 1988; Levin, 1986). For these stated reasons, the use of such a guide is presented as an exemplar in the effort to strengthen school-home connections.

...Students at all levels benefit when families are aware of, and involved in, their schooling.

Varieties and Benefits of School-Family Connections

The early and continuing message of research on school-home connection is a clear assertion of its importance for children's learning, development, and school success (Epstein, 1992; Henderson, 1987). Regardless of the family's educational background, level of achievement, or English language proficiency, the research finds that students at all levels benefit when families are aware of, and involved in, their schooling.



Javier Rodriquez reads for enjoyment at Central Park East I in Manhattan.
Photograph courtesy of Margaret Vishnupad.

Epstein (1993) has articulated a six-type framework for school-home connections. With teacher preparation as our major concern, our focus will be on those aspects of the school-home partnership that are most relevant to teachers' (and parents') tasks and goals. Epstein's "types" 1, 2, and 4, are summarized as follows:[1]

- Type 1: Basic obligations of families including parental skills and home conditions for learning at each age and grade level.
- Type 2: Basic obligations of schools including school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
- Type 4: Involvement of families in learning activities at home.

Teachers who succeed in involving parents on these three levels are found to have more positive feelings about teaching and to agree in overwhelming numbers that such participation leads to more effective practice, more successful students, and a more positive school climate. An additional finding, of great significance in urban schools, is that teachers involved in strong partnerships with students' homes make fewer stereotypic judgments about poor, less educated, or single parents than do other teachers. Consistent contact with parents raises teachers' expectations and level of appreciation of parents as educational partners (Epstein, 1990).

A counter-voice is heard from Fine (1993) in a "conversation" about the role of parents in urban public school reform. In the context of an economic and political climate that increasingly fails to support public education, she argues that "parental involvement is necessary but not sufficient to produce improved student outcomes" (p. 691). The need for a serious national commitment to quality education for **all** children may cause a framework such as Epstein's to seem inadequate for the tasks. Acknowledging the size of this need, however, should not negate Epstein's range of ways in which families can enter the sphere of school-home partnerships and expand their involvement. The designs of current programs for school reform (Comer, 1988; Ramirez-Smith, 1995; Levin, 1986; Keller, 1995) include opportunities for families to explore many levels of participation and to seek broader arenas of empowerment, including political action against urban neglect.

There is no mistaking the extensive findings of parents' awareness of the positive outcomes of school-home connections and their aspirations for their children's success (Epstein, 1993). Expanding on this concern, Epstein writes:

> The equity they seek first is for their children to have equal access to a good education, to be captured by the curriculum, to receive individual attention from caring

...teachers involved in strong partnerships with students' homes make fewer stereotypic judgments...

---

[1] The remaining variables in Epstein's framework are:

Type 3: Volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support the school and students.
Type 5: Participation by families in decision making, governance, and advocacy.
Type 6: Collaborations with community groups and agencies to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

> teachers, to graduate from high school, and to go on to more education and good jobs. These are powers that only some parents presently have, but that just about all parents very much want. (p. 715)

Regarding the ways in which families hope to realize this power, the most ubiquitous question reported is, "How can I help my children at home...?" (Epstein, 1993, p. 715).

Patterns of Decline in School-Family Connection

Despite the abundant findings on the benefits of school-home connections and the desire of most families for their children's success, family involvement with schools declines seriously after the fourth grade (Carnegie Commission on Adolescent Development, 1989). This trend is strongest in inner-city schools where families are most beset by survival issues and their children most in need of educational support. A further irony is that as their children move toward an increasingly hazardous adolescence, urban families find it even more difficult to enter into the more austere culture of the upper grades, middle and high schools. Many are unable to muster the self-confidence, the information-gathering skills, and the persistence to confront what they often perceive as alien environments. The result is that students, and the schools, as well, lose the partners they increasingly need as continuing sources of support.

The research offers a variety of further hypotheses concerning this withdrawal of connection with schools. As children seek greater independence, Stevenson (1992) sees parents' attention being turned to their own career development and other previously-neglected responsibilities. Certainly, the fact of increasing employment of women diminishes the possibility for many of those who were formerly active to continue their involvement. In the inner city, issues of safety gain importance daily, keeping many families, even those with grown children, at home during the evening hours.

Yet, there are other reports that many families interpret their children's growing independence, as they move toward adolescence, as a signal to relinquish some of their attention (Epstein, 1986). This tendency is often reinforced by developmental behaviors in which their children appear to be seeking "space," although, in reality, their desire for direction and guidance is still strong (Hilliard, 1992).

Another factor in parental withdrawal are the negative attitudes and practices of many administrators and teachers toward, especially, the families of poor children and youth (Hilliard, 1992; Seeley, 1981). Far from enlisting their support, school personnel often view the parents as part of the problem.

MacIver and Epstein (1990) have also noted that less information and inferior systems of communication with families are characteristic of schools for poor students. Parents and caregivers, when asked about school communication, repeatedly focus on the absence of guidance on how to help their children at home. While most families report that they often do help their children with learning tasks at home, they are uncertain that they have made the right choices or are "doing things right" (Epstein, 1986). This uncertainty and the need for more information from schools in order to be effective partners were emphasized by parents of elementary and middle grade students (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

What is at the heart of families' requests for more guidance to help their children achieve in school? How does it relate to the withdrawal from involvement with schools by poor, upper elementary and middle school families, in particular? What are the **perceived** tasks that parents and caregivers feel inadequate to perform?

Many families, especially if they are poor, undereducated, or lack English proficiency, feel they are helpless to support their children's more advanced and complex formal learning. My hypothesis, based on substantial experience, is that, if families feel they do not have expertise in the knowledge and skills their children are working to master, they will tend to abdicate in favor of the schools. In the materials and guidance they receive from schools to encourage involvement with their children's schoolwork, there may be little that links with their own accomplishments, survival skills, or strategies for problem-solving of many kinds.

It was to address this need, to redirect and clarify our expectations of families, and to enable them to effectively achieve the goals they share with educators, that the following Guide was created.

The Guide

Parents/Caregivers:

Your elementary and middle school children are at a dramatic moment in their lives, ready and eager to explore themselves, their relationships, and the world around them. Here are

TEN WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN'S LEARNING

1. Be aware of all that YOU already know and can do. Appreciate all the experience and skills gained in your lifetime. You have a wealth to share with your children.
2. Communicate: converse and read with your children, in whatever language you are most comfortable. Sharing thoughts and ideas is the most important thing. Discuss current events, from local to international. Watch and discuss news broadcasts; read newspapers and magazine articles that you both enjoy.
3. Tell your children about the places you've been and how you came to this community. Use maps as much as possible to describe your journey. Play the music and sing the songs you've brought with you. Tell about the landscapes, the people, the climate, and other interesting and colorful details.

4. Share your family history. Tell or write about family happenings – then and now. Let your children know where they fit into the picture. Use photos. Create albums, with stories you write together with your children, in any language, to explain the photos.

5. Discuss the work that you do and what life is like in the workplace. Don't forget to share your dreams for your future education and work. Listen to your children's hopes for the future. You can learn much from each other as you compare and explore the changes and the opportunities in the world of work that affect your lives.

6. Plan trips in your community and to other places, if you can. Learn about and take advantage of the free and low-cost trips available – to parks, museums, historic sites, and interesting neighborhoods. Use subway maps and road maps together. Have your children plan with you where you'll go and how you'll get there.

7. Create an atmosphere at home that will enable your children to study and do homework comfortably. Make study time a pleasant time; add a healthful snack. If you can, make it a time when the whole family turns off the TV and reads – for classes or for relaxation. Encourage brothers and sisters to help each other with schoolwork. Teaching leads to the best learning!

8. Be aware of your children's homework assignments and encourage them to share what they are learning at school. Keep in touch with your children's teachers about their schoolwork, both the accomplishments and the problems.

9. Encourage your children to help with tasks that will add to their academic and problem-solving skills; for example, planning and cooking meals, following recipes, measuring to cover a floor, going shopping, fixing an appliance. All of these will build their life skills and their school-related abilities.

10. Be a part of the educational process. Help to make your child's school the best it can be. Join the Parents' Association and participate in its activities. Attend parent-teacher conferences and ask questions about how *you can best support your children's learning.*

New Expectations and Formats for Family Involvement

In addition to its use with families, the Guide has been used with graduate and undergraduate preservice and inservice teachers as an orientation to issues of school and community. Discussed as an intervention that attempts to actualize the concept of "classroom and community as one" (Wigginton, 1979), it also provides students with a rich range of ways to promote school-home educational connections. Students become aware of ways for families to work with schools authentically and beneficially, while sharing meaningful information about themselves with their children. The guide's particular target is families whose knowledge and experience have been judged by others, and often, by themselves, to be irrelevant to their children's formal learning.

In deeper processing of the guide with preservice teachers, a number of objectives are accomplished that enhance their preparation for the inner-city settings in which they will be teaching.

First, the students begin to see the connections with, and to realize the significance of, prior courses

Kurell Brown and Cesar Santos read in their Central Park East I classroom.

Photograph courtesy of Margaret Vishnupad.

that focused on issues of human diversity. No longer decontextualized, this material fuses with their teacher training in a "pedagogical science" that prepares them with "culturally relevant and situated knowledge" to be applied in their future classrooms (Gordon, 1995).

Second, preservice teachers are able to see that while family members may not have the specific knowledge to contribute to the classroom's **skill** goals, they do have the knowledge, often based on life experience, to support vast areas of **conceptual** learning. Moreover, these important concepts can be experienced by students with their families in **active** learning settings, adding a critical component to successful outcomes. Some of the conceptual areas addressed in the guide are: concepts of time (see items 4 and 5); concepts of space (see items 3 and 6); awareness of other settings: languages, cultures, and landscapes (see items 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6); and the world of work – its requirements and challenges (see items 5 and 9).

Third, we uncover opportunities for authenticity in learning if we take a more substantive look at the lives of our children and families. While apprenticeship is rare in our time, there are intergenerational activities in many homes and communities that have instructional implications for our children. Moll and Greenberg's study (1990) provides heuristic examples of labor-related activities that demonstrate the funds of knowledge (e.g., auto and home repair, planting and gardening, cooking) and information related to acquiring services (e.g., medical, transportation, job opportunities) that exist in many households and may be shared with children.

In Epstein's (1987) studies of parallel school and family structures that promote student motivation and achievement, she asks the question, "What factors promote curiosity, high self-confidence, and the desire to learn?" (p. 46). In her detailed and complex answer a number of points are made clear. The first is that warmth and understanding are not enough. To be effective they must be connected to **practices that organize family life and that demonstrate the importance of education** (see items 7, 8, and 10).

Families motivate children to learn by giving them a opportunities to think, participate at home, make choices among activities, feel challenged in family discussions, feel successful, interact with others, test ideas and goals, and take control of the way they plan and spend time (pp. 50-51).

These threads are woven throughout the *Ten Ways to Support your Children's Learning*. They are realizable goals for most families to tackle. They bring teacher and family together in support of the best models for learning.

Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Their Roles with Students' Families

Giroux and McLaren (1986) describe new teachers who are unprepared to cultivate school-home linkages: "...many student teachers who find themselves teaching working class or minority students lack a well-articulated framework for understanding the class, cultural, ideological, and gender dimensions that inform classroom life" (p. 228).

Foster and Loven (1992) echo these concerns in their study of preservice teachers' training and their related attitudes about the families of their future students: "A major barrier to teachers including parents in their children's education is the lack of the teacher's understanding of the needs for parent involvement, the needs of families represented in the schools, and ways to accomplish parent involvement" (p. 13). They cite, as factors that perpetuate this condition, (a) unsystematic coursework, (b) minimal coverage in teacher education textbooks, and (c) lack of attention to family involvement on most state and national certifying examinations. In addition to their proposal for inclusion of the topic of family involvement in courses of study for future teachers, they recommend increased field experiences with "families of varying socioeconomic levels and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 18) and concurrent seminars for student teachers to process their reactions and confront their own needs and expectations.

To these I would add three more ideas to enrich the pedagogical framework of the teacher training. The first is the creation and modeling of a college classroom context that elicits and values what preservice teachers, themselves, already know (Yonemura, 1986). This is a valid principle in all circumstances. But, especially, in the case of our first-generation college students, the sociocultural insights they bring to school-home issues, especially as they relate to poor or immigrant families, are invaluable. Familiarity with the cultural material allows them to become interpreters of its meaning for their colleagues, extracting the enduring and life-serving elements that have enabled families to overcome generations of challenges.

Second, we should enable future teachers to discern and to develop the pedagogical possibilities that abound in the cultures of their students and their families. Heath (1983) gives us innumerable examples of the two-way path on which knowledge can move, from the community to the school and the reverse. One can resonate to her mention of a family quilt whose patterns are analyzed and used as a "kickoff for units on geometry" (p.399). An ethnographic approach can tap the richness of these possibilities from musical expressions to oral histories and beyond.

A third proposal is to use guides, such as the one included in this article, in a number of ways. Various components lend themselves to intergenerational workshop activities such as bookwriting, sharing of family stories and legends, as well as artwork of remembered landscapes. preservice teachers' organization of, and participation in, these events can make a great contribution to their training as family "involvers."

Finally, the approach and content of the guide itself have been, and can be, effectively used as a teacher training tool. These features translate into practice a number of theoretical constructs that are of critical importance for today's educators: the relationship between school and society (Dewey, 1915), the significance of the learners' social reality for advancing and expanding knowledge (Freire, 1973), and the value of using learning material that is "saturated with experience" (Vygotsky, 1962). It answers the question, if we were to put these vital ideas into practice, what would they look like?

Conclusion

Children and teachers in today's urban settings need support from the whole community to aid the learning process. The obstacles that continue to impede families from becoming partners with schools can be overcome, even with families of older children. To forge more effective school-home connections, certain strategies are pivotal:

- Schools must strive to elicit the **existing** knowledge, life experience, and culture of families and to demonstrate how these resources can be used to strengthen their children's learning.
- preservice teachers must be enabled to build **their** self-knowledge and learn to apply it in ways that enhance their effective collaboration with families.
- The pedagogy of our institutions, for our student teachers and, by extension, our children, must be sensitive to, and work constructively with, the social realities of urban life.

> ...Obstacles that continue to impede families from becoming partners with schools can be overcome...

The Guide presented here is offered as a possible model for the conversion of theory into practice. Used flexibly, it can communicate to future teachers the varied contexts and contents and the life-long joys of learning.

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School-based Practicum in Reading Disabilities

Laura Klenk & Janice F. Almasi

ABSTRACT

Supervised clinical practica are vital components of the Reading Specialist Program at The University at Buffalo. The authors describe the organization of their school-based summer practicum, along with the theoretical models on which they based the instruction, assessment, and supervision components. Anecdotes from the summer clinic are included to further illustrate the implementation of these components.

As new faculty members in the Graduate School of Education at SUNY-Buffalo (UB), we looked forward to the challenge and promise of organizing and supervising the school-based clinical practicum in reading during the Summer 1996 term. Our own clinical experiences were acquired at different universities (i.e., Janice – Maryland); thus we brought to the current experience somewhat contrasting visions of a school-based practicum. However, both of us were committed to a model of remedial reading based on principles of ongoing, informal assessment that is rooted in theoretically sound instruction. As we planned together, we found ourselves continuously clarifying and revising our visions. In this paper, we share the model into which we organized these "principled visions" for ourselves and our students. We begin by placing this practicum into a larger context with a brief description of the reading program at UB, along with an introduction to the local context of the school-based practicum. We then describe the organization of the practicum, followed by presentations of our theoretical and instructional frameworks, our emerging model of supervision, and, to conclude, some reflections on this experience.

> ...a model of remedial reading based on principles of ongoing, informal assessment that is rooted in theoretically sound instruction.

Graduate Programs in Reading at SUNY-Buffalo

Our graduate students have two options in the reading program. The most popular option is that of the M.Ed. in Elementary Education with a reading emphasis. Students in this program take 15 hours of reading courses, including a corrective reading course for classroom teachers, a reading and computer course, language arts, and master's level methods courses for early literacy, primary, and upper grades. This program allows students to have a concentration in reading with enough flexibility to take content-area courses, thus leading to a well-rounded generalist degree. The second option is the clinical program, which leads to certification as a reading specialist. Students in this program take the coursework described above as prerequisites to a 12-hour sequence of courses in diagnosis and remediation. Two clinical practica are required in this program. One is a traditional, on-campus clinical course during which students are closely supervised in the formal diagnosis, assessment, and remedial instruction of 2-3 children. As the Director of the Reading Clinic at UB, Michael Kibby is the faculty member responsible for this sequence. Dr. Kibby is the senior member of our reading program and chair of the Department of Learning & Instruction. The Assistant Director of the Reading Clinic is Mrs. Debra Dechert, a graduate of the reading specialist program. She handles the daily administrative operations of the clinic, along with supervising clinicians. Most students complete this sequence before taking the school-based summer clinic. This year, due to a one-year lapse in the summer program, we allowed some students who had not yet completed the entire sequence into the school-based practicum; we also allowed an advanced student in the reading emphasis program to enroll in the practicum as an elective.

The School-based Summer Practicum

For the past 5 years, the summer clinic has been held in elementary schools in Lancaster, New York, where Dr. Kibby has established a strong, supportive relationship with the central administration, building principals, and classroom teachers. In 1996 we were offered facilities and staff support at Court Street Elementary School. Nancy Buscaglia, principal at Court Street, acted on our behalf to secure equipment and materials for the clinic, including trade books, big books, writing and art supplies, computers with appropriate software, printers, photocopier, custodial services, and a part-time library aide. In return, we waived the regular fee of $250.00 to 40 youngsters from the Lancaster School District. The five elementary principals in Lancaster, acting on the advice of their own reading specialists, referred 8 children from each of their buildings to the summer clinic. Parental permission was secured through the principals as well. In addition to students from Lancaster, 18 children from other school districts in the region were enrolled through normal clinic recruitment procedures.

The school-based clinic compliments the traditional clinic model and offers some advantages. First, two-thirds of the children who attend live in close proximity to the site, thus ensuring a high attendance rate. Second, the space provided allows our clinicians to prepare their classrooms for thematically-organized instruction. Third, the school-based clinic allows us to fulfill the University mission of community service. Fourth, our own students benefit from their acquaintance with a local district as evidenced by the fact that several of these clinicians have been hired by the Lancaster schools for elementary and reading positions.

Organizational Model

By pairing clinicians together we attempted to achieve our goal of preparing them to assume the collaborative role that is expected when classroom teachers and reading specialists work together in "push-in" models of remediation. Through this collaborative endeavor we hoped to impress upon our clinicians the importance of coordinated, supportive instruction rather than the fragmented instructional experiences that are still typical for many children with reading difficulties (Johnston & Allington, 1991). We paired the clinicians with the explicit expectation that they would plan instruction together and that they would alternately serve in the classroom as instructor or observer. Prior coursework in the reading program emphasized the importance of informed observation or "kidwatching" for reading, writing, and oral language development (Bissex, 1985; Goodman, 1985; Harker & Green, 1985). Working in pairs provided each clinician with opportunities to practice and hone their observation skills. In most cases we were able to pair more experienced teachers with clinicians who had less classroom experience.

Each pair of clinicians was responsible for the assessment and instruction of six to eight children. The number of children accepted into the school-based clinic was determined by the number of clinicians who were enrolled. Heeding the advice of Johnston & Allington (1991) we kept the student-teacher ratio low: a maximum of 4:1. This year, 16 graduate students registered; thus we capped the enrollment of children at 64.

The children were grouped by age and by the types of reading problems for which they were referred. For example, several youngsters had just completed a second year of kindergarten without achieving the success in acquiring print concepts expected by the K-1 teachers in their schools. A few other children, who had just completed first grade and were considered non-readers, had been recommended for retention by their teachers. Thus we formed a team of "emergent readers and writers" who ranged in age from 6 to 8. Although we deliberately grouped the children by such characteristics as these, each group retained the heterogeneous nature of any classroom – general or remedial.

...diagnosis and instruction are intricately woven together...

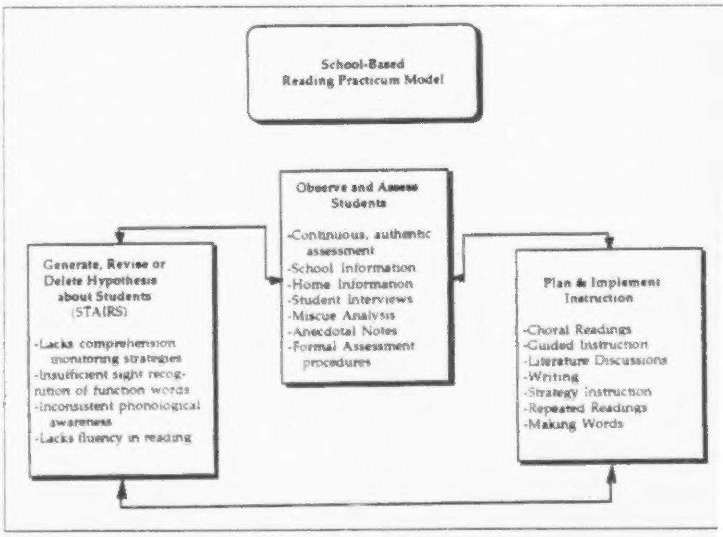
As is typical in similar clinical settings, we expected that clinicians would turn in brief weekly overviews of their instructional plans. Detailed daily lesson plans were required each morning and were turned in to the supervisors 30 minutes prior to the arrival of the children. At the conclusion of the summer program, clinicians were required to write formal reports for the parents and teachers of each child. Instructional planning and reporting for this practicum were based on the theoretical model that guided our course development. We now turn our attention to this model.

Theoretical Framework

The traditional clinical sequence in the reading specialist progra affords our students the opportunity to complete in-depth diagnosis of reading problems using formal and informa measures. Clinicians administer psychoeducational tests to determin ability and achievement levels, and they learn to interpret, with appropriate cautions, the results of these tests. They closely observe and evaluate the responses of individual children to diagnostic lessons However, we recognize that the responsibilities of the reading specialis in contemporary settings often extends beyond the role of one-to-on diagnosis and tutoring. Therefore our program also prepares readin specialists to work with classroom teachers as consultants and instructional partners.

In accord with these objectives, we introduced the clinicians to model of remediation in which diagnosis and instruction are intricatel woven together by ongoing, informal assessments (Gillett & Temple 1994). A graphic model of this organizer is depicted in Figure 1

Figure 1: School-based Practicum Model


School-Based
Reading Practicum Model
Observe and Assess Students
-Continuous, authentic assessment
-School Information
-Home Information
-Student Interviews
-Miscue Analysis
-Anecdotal Notes
-Formal Assessment procedures
Generate, Revise or Delete Hypothesis about Students (STAIRS)
-Lacks comprehension monitoring strategies
-Insufficient sight recognition of function words
-Inconsistent phonological awareness
-Lacks fluency in reading
Plan & Implement Instruction
-Choral Readings
-Guided Instruction
-Literature Discussions
-Writing
-Strategy Instruction
-Repeated Readings
-Making Words

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Following this model, clinicians prepared instructional activities prior to the arrival of the children based on information provided by classroom teachers, reading specialists, and parents of the children. In some instances, samples of children's work were included along with test scores and questionnaires. As clinicians planned their initial lessons they were required to explain how each instructional activity would be used to achieve learning objectives and serve as a tool for assessment.

Effective reading teachers in any setting must be reflexive in their thinking and planning in order to maximize their responsiveness to children (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, & Vavrus, 1986). Reflexivity and responsiveness are even more crucial when teachers are working with youngsters who have special learning problems (Maheady, Harper, Mallette, & Karnes, 1993). Since we expect children to make progress during the course of the summer clinic, it is important that clinicians reflexively observe and note successes and failures in order to tailor their instruction to the children's changing needs.

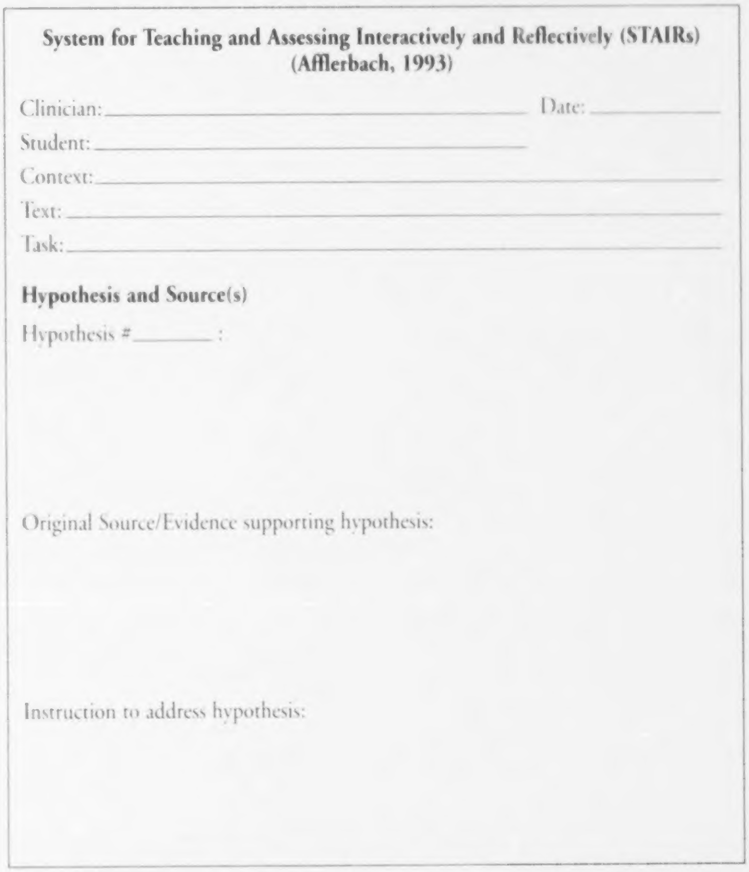
In addition to daily lesson plans, the clinicians were required to organize and maintain a record-keeping system that was congruent with our theoretical model. This system, based on Afflerbach's (1993) System for Teaching and Assessing Interactively and Reflectively (STAIRS), consisted of maintaining logs based on the following three components: (a) observing and assessing students; (b) generating, revising, or deleting hypothesis about student needs; and (c) planning and implementing theme-based, integrated, explicit instruction. While it was necessary for the clinicians to begin their work with the students from one of these components, we emphasized the reflexivity of this framework, since each component informs and is informed by the others. Thus, a clinician might begin the process by carefully scrutinizing the information presented in school documents and parent information forms in order to form initial hypotheses about a child; however, we expected that these hypotheses might quickly change based on observations and assessments made during the initial instructional sessions.

This system requires the clinician to provide evidence of these hypotheses from their own observations or from samples of children's work, as well as a statement of instructional plans designed to address given strengths and needs. The form shown in Figure 2 is used by clinicians to record their original hypotheses; they are subsequently required to note on similar form whether the original hypotheses are being maintained, revised, or dropped, in accordance with observed needs of the children.

The following anecdotes serve to illustrate this process. In the first case, we received reports for two children – from different schools – indicating that these youngsters, a boy and a girl, were frequently unruly, disruptive, and uncooperative during instruction. (This is not surprising from children who perceive themselves as failures in the eyes of their teachers and peers.) The clinician pairs to whom these youngsters were assigned prepared highly structured lessons in anticipation of similar problems. In both cases, the children failed to demonstrate any of the behavior problems that were documented in their files. The principal of the young boy called us early in the practicum to check on his progress. The following day, she arrived at Court Street School to observe for herself a child whom she thought could not "...stay in one place for more than a few moments." In fact, this child quickly established himself as the most mature in his team and was viewed by his clinicians as a positive leader for his teammates.

In another instance, clinicians began deductive phonics instruction with word families for a child considered by his classroom teacher to have poor phonetic decoding skills. This youngster was frequently overheard complaining, "I can't hear anything!" He displayed an angry, resentful attitude, and often removed himself from group activities to retreat to more private areas of the class (behind a door, on the floor underneath desks, etc.). A phone call was made to his mother, who confirmed that the youngster often made the same complaint at home, but the parents simply felt their son had "selective hearing;" that is, he heard them when it was to his advantage.

Figure 2: Sample STAIRs Original Hyposthesis Sheet



System for Teaching and Assessing Interactively and Reflectively (STAIRs)
(Afflerbach, 1993)

Clinician:____________________ Date:________
Student:____________________
Context:____________________
Text:____________________
Task:____________________

Hypothesis and Source(s)

Hypothesis #________ :

Original Source/Evidence supporting hypothesis:

Instruction to address hypothesis:

Upon further questioning, the mother confirmed that her son had a history of high fever and chronic ear infections during infancy and early childhood, thus leading us to hypothesize that the child might have suffered some degree of hearing loss. Given this information, the clinicians revised their hypothesis and began emphasizing more visual methods of decoding, such as personal word banks, word walls in the classroom, and oral fluency strategies. A clear and positive change in this child's demeanor, participation, and achievement was almost immediate. Within a few days, he asked his clinicians if he could come down to our office and read aloud to us the story he had been practicing, in order to demonstrate his increasing fluency.

The final reports submitted by clinicians at the conclusion of the practicum were modeled after the STAIRS sheets, and the clinicians used information from these forms extensively in their reports.

Instructional Frameworks

As we observed the clinicians preparing their classrooms for thematically-integrated literacy instruction during three days of pre-clinic workshops, we noted several patterns of organization, some more effective than others. For example, some clinicians were focused on planning particular methods of assessment and instruction, such as DRTA's, beginning phonics, Language Experience, etc. Others were focused on collecting specific materials; particular types of storybooks, big books, computer software, etc. Leu & Kinzer (1991) explain that teachers who rely on a framework of *materials* to organize reading instruction have the advantage of predetermined lessons that relieve them of many instructional decisions – an advantage that is surely beneficial to new teachers or those, who like our clinicians, must quickly organize a classroom.

The primary disadvantage of a *materials* framework is the lack of flexibility in planning for children with specific needs. This is particularly true for basal reading series and similar published curricula. While our clinicians sought out relatively non-restrictive materials, we recognized that, in the real world of schools, the presence of published curricula may contribute to decreased incentive for planning instruction based on the needs of individual readers. Likewise, according to Leu and Kinzer (1991), teachers who proceed from a *methods* framework have the advantage of following well-rehearsed routines that can be applied to a variety of materials. This framework does allow the teacher more flexibility than the materials framework, but it can also become confining for teachers who rely on a few specific methods.

In addition to the methods and materials frameworks, we noted that some of our clinicians were spending a great deal of time planning *activities* that they thought might be 'fun' or 'motivating' for struggling readers, such as class mysteries and dramatic story reenactments by clinicians. Experienced, knowledgeable teachers are always looking for new activities to add to their instructional repertoire, but activities – just as methods and materials – are appropriate primarily as they contribute to comprehension and self-regulation. Teachers who are wedded to activities, particularly "cute" activities, often evaluate their success in terms of the degree to which the children enjoy and participate in these activities, rather than the degree to which learning, thinking, and progress in reading has occurred. In addition, the time spent by teachers on creating such activities might be far better spent analyzing recordings of struggling readers for miscue analyses, searching writing samples for evidence of phonemic awareness or knowledge of conventional spelling patterns, or in planning instruction based on such assessments.

We added "*activities*" to our revision of the Leu and Kinzer (1991) framework (see Figure 3). During a weekly seminar, we asked the clinicians to identify the framework with which they felt the strongest identification. Most had little difficulty placing themselves in a category. After reviewing the limitations of these frameworks, we presented

Figure 3: Frameworks for Teaching

Frameworks for Teaching:

How Teachers Organize and Plan
Reading Instruction

Methods

Project READ
Retellings
Making Words
Language Experience
Reading Recovery
Stevenson Spelling

Materials

Wright Group
Big Books
SRA
Computer Programs
(i.e. Reader Rabbit)
Primers/Basals
Trade Books
Skill Builders

Activities

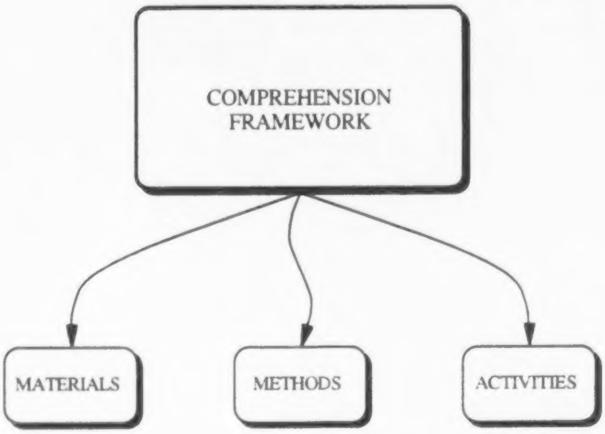
Daily Calendar
Word Walls
Read-Alouds
Word Games
DEAR Time/SSR
Journal writing
Class Mystery
Dramatic Play

Adapted from Leu and Kinzer (1991).

our modification of the comprehension alternative suggested by Leu and Kinzer (1991), using the graphic organizer seen in Figure 4. Planning from this model, we explained, allows teachers to choose from an array of methods, materials and activities, as long as the goal of instruction is self-regulated, independent reading for comprehension.

The introduction of the comprehension framework produced tangible results. Some clinicians were able to free themselves from restrictive frameworks and to begin thinking more flexibly about planning instruction. For others, this result was obtained when, as supervisors, we listened to clinician pairs struggling to find agreement for their classroom organization. We would ask them to identify the framework under which they were trying to proceed and then direct their attention to their goals. The comprehension framework especially forced activities-focused clinicians to confront their rationale for planning a particular activity, thus leading them to consider comprehension-based alternatives.

Figure 4: Alternative Framework for Instruction



Adapted from Leu and Kinzer (1991).

This framework also proved useful during subsequent post-observation conferences, when clinicians were asked to evaluate their instruction with regard to comprehension monitoring. Daily observations and conferences were integral components of our supervision model, and it is this component that we describe next.

Supervision Model

From the outset, both of us were committed to a "hands-on" approach to the supervision of clinicians. We were fortunate to have two graduate teaching assistants assigned to the clinic. One of these, a doctoral student, was a veteran reading teacher and summer clinic supervisor. The second graduate assistant had recently completed final requirements for the reading specialist degree. She participated in the summer program as an internship in clinical supervision.

We began with a typical clinical routine: the four of us read and responded with comments to daily lesson plans before the children arrived each morning, followed by classroom observations of the clinicians whose lessons we had read. Post-observation conferences were conducted with each clinician pair on a daily basis. As we met together each morning to review daily lesson plans, all four supervisors shared our observations and relayed any concerns or praise for individual clinicians or clinician pairs. This routine became problematic, however, when we realized that the clinicians were at times confused or even distressed by inconsistent – or stylistically different – responses to lesson plans and classroom observations. Therefore we found it necessary to focus our discussions more specifically, identifying for each other and the graduate assistants our criteria for effective responses to lesson plans and post-observation conferences.

Borrowing from the concept of "horizontal evaluations" (Gitlin, 1981, 1990), a dialogical process that is intended to promote professional growth rather than merely rank the planning and teaching skills of teachers, we began our post-observation conferences by first asking the clinicians to describe for us what they had observed during their instruction. In this way, we validated their observations and intuitions. Because the clinicians often noted concerns similar to our own, this saved time and allowed us to focus on solutions to the most pressing difficulties in each group. By limiting our input, there were fewer opportunities for the clinicians to receive mixed signals.

Another feature of our supervisory model was the use of a Competency Handbook, another feature borrowed – with modifications – from the second author's clinical experience at Maryland. Each clinician received a handbook, spiral-bound with plastic covers, which contained brief descriptions of a variety of clinical expectations, including: theory-based decisions, student outcomes (e.g., risk-taking, use of flexible comprehension monitoring strategies, motivation), clinician outcomes related to support skills (e.g., daily plans, hypothesis maintenance) and clinician outcomes related to appropriate instructional skills (e.g. development of phonemic awareness, direct instruction for strategic processing). The Competency Handbooks served two purposes. First, as supervisors we routinely added our signatures, along with positive comments regarding specific incidents, next to competencies we observed during the course of instruction, during seminars, in post-observation conferences, and after final reports were approved. Second, the clinicians gained a credible record of their experience in the clinic, which we encouraged them to add to their professional portfolios.

Reflections

Now that we have had a few months to distance ourselves from the intense demands of the summer practicum, we have begun organizing the follow-up process, including surveys of the classroom and reading teachers to whom the clinic students are now assigned, along with the parents of these children. In addition to learning about continued progress made by the children, we are also interested in getting feedback from the adults on their responses to the final reports. We will survey the clinicians as well to get their impressions of the clinical experience and its influence on their current teaching practice.

We are also evaluating for ourselves the various elements of the organizational and supervision models described earlier. For example, the clinicians often seemed overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork we required, and we may need to streamline the lesson plan/hypothesis maintenance system. Also, we want to start the next clinic with our supervisory model intact, having prepared ourselves and the graduate assistants in the use of horizontal evaluations. This model lends itself well to peer-evaluation (Gitlin, 1989), and we could take time at the outset of the clinic to train clinician pairs to conduct horizontal evaluations of each other. We could then add peer evaluation to our competency handbook as another useful tool in collaborative professional practice.

Throughout the course of the summer, we were challenged by a thoughtful colleague who felt that our model was too "loose" and that we should instead have expectations that all clinicians would master a certain set of remedial techniques rather than be left to independently choose instruction and assessment methods, materials, and activities. We particularly struggled with this challenge as we observed – with some pain – the few clinicians who were not adequately prepared for the clinical experience. Perhaps we *should* have required them to follow more closely scripted routines, in order to scaffold the clinical model we envisioned.

In the end, perhaps out of self-justification, or perhaps due to our commitment to this model, we decided that it was in fact a good decision to allow the clinicians freedom to "float" at times, to experience – under close supervision – the often distressing, anxiety-provoking indecision that all of us underwent as we gained insight and maturity into our professional specialty. In fact, it is possible that this somewhat awkward process serves to more appropriately scaffold for the clinicians the "real-world" occupation of the school-based reading specialist. Our follow-up conversations with them will hopefully enlighten us further in this regard.

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> and maturity into our
> professional specialty.

In the meantime, we retain rewarding memories of children who entered the clinic with reluctance and frustration but left with confidence and hopefulness for future progress in reading and writing. The day before the clinic ended, the oldest group of students came to our office where they got down on their knees – with hands clasped as if in prayer – to plead with us for "another half of clinic." The melodrama of the moment did not obscure for us the more potent message we received from these youngsters: "This has been a good place, a safe place, a fun place for us to take the necessary risks that help us make progress in achieving age and grade level literacy development."

In truth, we all took risks: the clinicians by exposing their professional development to intense scrutiny; the children, by exposing their vulnerability to unfamiliar peers and adults; the instructors and supervisors by trusting the clinicians to make wise decisions, or to modify their actions when necessary. Clearly we have not answered all of our own questions about supervising clinical practica, but we share this experience along with an invitation for our colleagues at other institutions to enrich this experience with descriptions of their own programs.

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The Literacy Focused School: A University-School Collaboration Project

Carol G. Hittleman

ABSTRACT

University-school collaborations can transform current preservice teacher preparation models and enhance the professional development of inservice teachers. This article presents such a collaboration project. The beginnings of this partnership, its goals, collaborations among the participants, and preliminary results are presented. Participants' reflections are included as a means of evaluating the success of the project.

As visitors enter Miss D's classroom they ask, "Where is the teacher?" "Why are the children scattered around the room?" "What is creating the hum of busy voices?" Upon a closer look, they find Miss D sitting on the floor with two children who are reading books about transportation. The children are showing her the books and explaining how one book tells about boats and the other about airplanes. One child comments, "They're both written by the same author." Miss D praises their expert observations and jots down a few notes in her conference book.

The visitors look further and find Mrs. W. the reading teacher, similarly engaged with two children. In this group they are discussing the "beautiful language" the children found in the books they are reading. In still another part of the room, Miss B, a student observer from an undergraduate reading methods course, is far more actively engaged than just observing. She is listening as two children read to her from the parts of their books which they found most exciting. The fourth adult in the room is the University faculty member, who directs the University-School Collaboration Project, and at this moment, is in the role of spectator closely observing the interactions among children and adults.

Why consider a university-school collaboration?

Faculty in The School of Education of Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus, believe that university-school partnerships have excellent potential for more effectively preparing future teachers while concomitantly enhancing the professional development of inservice teachers. From a literature review of university-school collaboration projects and professional development schools (PDS) we saw the rationale and possibilities for such collaborations. From The Holmes Group (1990) report, we drew a concept of professional development schools in which an institutional coalition would foster collaborations among universities, schools of education, and public schools. Other advocates (Hawley 1990; Holmes Group 1990; Hopkins & Moore 1989; Nystrand 1991; Theobald, 1990) agreed that PDS offer significant promise for restructuring university-school district relationships. From them we realized a set of common principles:

- The collaboration should provide benefits to all parties and mutual dependencies.
- During the collaboration process, participants developed shared visions and values.
- Within this environment a community of learners is established.
- Classrooms for placement of future teachers are chosen because they provide opportunities where the inservice teacher models exemplary practices.
- Reflectiveness about teaching and learning are modeled and encouraged during classroom collaborations as well as at inservice opportunities for current professionals.
- Conducting school-based research is a natural event during collaborations among preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and university faculty.
- Children in the PDS classrooms are afforded exemplary teaching and learning opportunities.
- Site-based preparation during coursework and field experiences provides authentic, natural environments for preservice teachers to learn about learning and teaching.
- Renewal for all involved is experienced due to the nature of the collaborations, reflections.

From Goodlad (1990) we interpreted an agenda for change with respect to the preparation of teachers for our nation's schools. From his nineteen postulates, one in particular provided us with additional evidence of the need for collaborative work between our teacher preparation program and the public school systems which accept the preservice candidates for student teaching. According to Goodlad (1990):

> programs for the education of educators must assure for each candidate the availability of a wide array of laboratory settings for observation, hands-on experiences, and exemplary schools for internships and residencies....

We realized the preparation of preservice teachers is probably best accomplished by a careful blend of coursework, fieldwork, and supervised practice. This fieldwork and supervised practice have the greatest positive impact upon learning when they take place in schools of exemplary performance, under the supervision of outstanding practitioners. Quality preparation of future teachers is insured when

> ...fieldwork and supervised practice have the greatest positive impact upon learning when they take place in schools of exemplary performance...

provision is made for the continuity of relationships among preservice and inservice teachers and university faculty over extended periods of time (i.e., beyond the traditional last semester of undergraduate work). While we have to consider the preparation of preservice educators, we should also attend to the continued professional development of novice and experienced teachers. Their needs would be best served through a combination of formal course offerings on university campuses, more informal school-based offerings determined by the teachers' needs and interests, and opportunities for reflective collaborations. These opportunities could be provided through participation in focused mini courses, study groups, curriculum development opportunities, research groups, and mentoring projects. Furthermore, reflective activities and action research should be an on-going practice within school classrooms and at the university. The realized and potential human resources of a school of education and a public school system are enormous. We recognized that each institution holds personnel with unique talents and expertise for enhancing the professional growth and development of all participants in this collaborative project.

How did the university-school collaboration project begin?

The Dean of Long Island University's School of Education believed in these premises. He supported three credits released time for me to begin a collaborative project with a public school system. Meetings were arranged with the principal of Washington Elementary School in the Huntington School District. Huntington, which is located on the North Shore of Long Island, has a culturally diverse student population. It afforded an opportunity for preservice teachers to participate in schools that offered a variety of educational programs intended to meet the needs of diverse student populations. I shared information about PDS with the principal, and we discussed the possibilities for a university-school collaboration project. The principal was eager to participate so we met with the Assistant Superintendent and further refined the roles and responsibilities we would assume in the project as well as the benefits to the school and the university. Our enthusiasm rose as we met with the school's faculty to discuss the project and receive their input about developing a focus for the collaboration. We discussed the school's values and goals which included an emphasis on creating and maintaining a respectful learning community while enhancing literacy development for ALL students. There was unanimous agreement that the primary focus of the collaboration would be literacy and the development of literacy-focused classrooms.

We initiated brainstorming sessions focused on their literacy program. The first session was filled with comments, memories, and issues about "What Was" (i.e., the history of their reading instruction methodology, basal adoptions, and other resources). In our second session we brainstormed about "What Is" (i.e., the current methodology and materials in use). The focus of our third session was a discussion of "What Could Be." In preparation for this session, teachers were asked to respond with "agree or disagree" to a one page set of belief statements about literacy-focused classrooms. These beliefs were adapted from factors that promote success and prevent failure in literacy-focused classrooms (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Belief Statements

1. Classrooms must have clear goals and standards.
2. Emphasis should be placed on what students CAN DO.
3. Time should be allotted for daily independent, self-selected reading and writing.
4. There should be opportunities for whole class supported reading and writing.
5. There should be developmentally appropriate supported reading and writing.
6. There should be daily teacher read alouds.
7. There should be consistency within the classrooms as well as between classroom and special programs.
8. The teacher should have COMMITMENT and PASSION for what s/he does.
9. Whenever and wherever needed, there should be extra supported reading and writing.

At the next meeting we discussed their responses. There was total agreement with the statements. We then used the same belief statements to assess their current classroom practices and evaluate whether there was consistency between the beliefs and their practices. The discussion stemming from this activity was the beginning of our journey and explorations into "What Could Be." During this third brainstorming session, we discussed current literacy research and theory, instructional methodologies, appropriate materials and resources, and the teachers' needs for collaborations and workshops in specific areas. These preliminary discussions and explorations allowed us to create guidelines for a project model which would be beneficial to the school community (teachers, children, and parents) as well as the School of Education's preservice education majors.

What were the project's goals and how were they addressed?

We identified three broad goals for the project:

1. To create an outstanding literacy-focused environment to nurture the development of preservice education majors.
2. To create a collaborative environment which would continue and extend the development of novice inservice teachers as well as experienced teachers.
3. To foster an environment which would support the research and development of the teaching profession and to share the findings with broader audiences.

We determined that I would spend one day a week at Washington School. During the first semester of the project, preservice education majors enrolled in a reading methods course with me were placed in Washington School's elementary classrooms to fulfill the required twenty hours of observation. These students attended a three hour class at the university one morning a week. Cooper (1993), the required course text, provided a strong link between the theoretical framework they were developing and the literacy-focused belief system developing in the school. The undergraduate students participated in frequent informal meetings with me during my weekly visits to the classrooms in which they observed. In addition, formal seminars were held weekly in the school building. Classroom teachers and the principal were invited to attend these seminars, providing another collaborative experience linking theory and practice. The following semester, six of these students were placed in the school for their student teaching experience, thus providing continuity for all of us. Throughout the two semesters, the undergraduate students attended all faculty meetings, workshops, parent-teacher conferences, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and other school and district events as means for gaining additional professional experiences.

Frequent individual, small group, grade level, and school staff meetings were held at the school throughout the year. Topics for these meetings were suggested by teachers, the building administrator, and/or me. Significant time was spent on explorations of the organization and time management in a literacy-focused classroom; development of thematic units including extensive, meaningful literacy experiences; evaluation of children's literature; and literacy assessment through the use of portfolios. Participants began to gather single copies of children's literature selections appropriate to their thematic units. These books were circulated among teachers with an attached literature evaluation checklist adapted from Cullinan & Galda (1994). Teachers began to notice the attributes of fine literature selections appropriate for the themes they were developing in their classrooms. As we identified specific books through the evaluation process, the principal and the librarian ordered them from their budgets. To support the use of these materials, I provided instructional models for using the books for read-alouds to the whole class, for small group teacher-guided instruction, and as independent reading selections. Literacy strategies required for constructing meaning from reading the books were also identified and modeled and a list of meaningful experiences to encourage students' responses to the literature was developed.

To further support the school's efforts in creating literacy-focused learning communities, I met with the PTA and apprised them of the project. It was agreed that I should make a presentation to a general PTA meeting which was attended by parents, teachers, and the university undergraduate education students. An explanation of literacy development was presented and the teachers' efforts toward this goal were discussed. Examples of the use of children's literature in a thematic unit of study was demonstrated as I read from some of the literature selections, modeled possible instructional strategies, and suggested a variety of children's responses to the literature. We discussed the need for children to participate in a meaningful integrated language arts program with opportunities provided so they could view themselves as successful authors through publishing their own books. The PTA was asked to support a School Publishing Center to meet this need, and they voted to appropriate funds to support such a center. This support included the purchase of a laminating machine, a binding machine, and materials for the creation of student-authored books. In addition, the PTA agreed to work with the librarian to coordinate parent volunteers to carry out the work of the publishing center. The principal continued in his efforts to support literacy development by seeking out a local legislator and inviting him to visit the classrooms and talk with teachers and students about their work. This effort brought additional funding to the school for the purchase of literature through a legislative grant.

What were the initial results?

Classroom teachers reported that the support of their administrator along with the University faculty member's presence in the building on a regular basis prompted them to maintain a focus on the goals of the project. Teachers informed us they were invigorated by the collaborations among the participants. Some teachers continued to explore additional literacy focused professional development. One team of classroom teachers and the reading teacher attended Columbia University's Reading Workshop. The experiences encountered were similarly supportive of their developing theoretical framework. It became obvious that we were well into our journey, and our first two goals were receiving significant attention.

Teachers... were invigorated by the collaborations among the participants.

Our third goal was to support the research and development of the teaching profession. A team of classroom teachers, a reading teacher, a librarian and I were invited to present our project at the 30th Annual New York State Reading Association Conference (Hittleman, Wangerstein & White, 1996). Our presentation included topics about: The University-School Collaboration Journey; Identifying Our School Community's Values; The Library/Classroom Literacy Connection; The Literature/Literacy Connection Through Readers' Workshop; and, The Math/Literature/Literacy Connection. We determined that the discussions and planning we would engage in to prepare this presentation would further enhance professional growth and provide a more formal structure to our analysis of the project.

The undergraduate students reported that there were varied opportunities through which they enhanced their professional growth. They felt they developed a strong theoretical framework supported with instructional methodology and knowledge of resources from which they could build their own literacy-focused classrooms. One student reported, "It was terrific being made to feel like an equal professional, having our ideas listened to and considered, even though we were new at it all." Another told us, "I kept comparing experiences with a friend in another school, and I realized how much more I was gaining from this project."

Of course, we have to look to an audience beyond ourselves to evaluate if we are becoming educators of excellence. To do this we have begun to ask, "What did the children gain?" Our belief is that they were provided with exceptional opportunities in meaningful literacy experiences. They display behaviors which tell us they are ALL constructors of meaning and are conscious of the attributes a reader displays. Comments from second graders in Miss D's classroom suggest that they are aware of themselves as readers. In writing about themselves as readers they validate our beliefs. They describe themselves as: "I'm the kind of reader who – notices beautiful language, reads in the voice of the characters, reads poetry, reads chorally with a partner, likes writing and quiet and nobody to talk to me, who puts post-its in my books and notices things from books, brings a lot of books home, reads hard books and long books, talks to my friend about books, likes challenging books."

Where do our reflections lead us?

We are confident that the university-school collaboration project made excellent progress toward reaching our goals. The professional development of the preservice education majors was nurtured through numerous opportunities to blend theory and practice in outstanding literacy-focused environments. The collaborations among teachers, administrator, university faculty, and preservice education majors provided a richer field-based experience than previous situations in which student observers had been randomly placed in schools and classrooms for one semester during a methods course and then in a different school and classroom for the student-teaching experience. The extended opportunity to student teach in the same school and sometimes the same classroom in which they had observed provided continuity and allowed for long-range planning. It gave the undergraduates opportunities to observe child development over time as well as consistently reflect on their own professional development.

Novice inservice teachers and experienced teachers agreed there was a focus to their teaching and learning, and they were able to broaden as well as deepen their understanding of literacy development. The informal opportunities for sharing with a university instructor during informal visits in classrooms, and the small group and larger school staff meetings made it possible for them to pursue issues which were their own in a supportive learning community environment.

Joshua McNeill in his multiage 1-2 class.

Photograph courtesy of Sue Clarke and Debby Wiede, Taconic Hills School District.

The leadership of the university faculty member in planning a conference proposal and presentation opened the door to a new experience for a few teachers. They enthusiastically participated in the conference through sharing their work. Planning meetings in preparation for the presentation provided time to refocus and reflect on the learning and teaching occurring in their classrooms.

Through my own reflections I realized that the participation of other university faculty might enhance the university-school project. I believe that rather than one faculty member, a team of university faculty could offer more collaborations in more classrooms. In addition they could support a larger cohort of undergraduate students so that other methods courses and more student teachers could be included in the model. Extending the project in this way would bring us closer to Goodlad's recommendation that preservice education programs carefully blend coursework, fieldwork, and supervised practice in exemplary settings. The change needs to be from business as usual in schools and universities to the creation of exemplary environments where future and current educators enhance their professional growth through consistent participation over time in learning communities which encourage and support reflective, collaborative practitioners. Goodlad (1983) reminds us:

> Futurists have a tantalizing way of describing the year 2001 as though being there has little to do with getting there. The future simply arrives full-blown. But it is the succession of days and years between now and then that will determine what life will be like.... (p. 321).

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Perspectives

For the second year *The Language and Literacy Spectrum* presents the **Perspectives** section of the journal. This year we invited two colleagues to react to Shannon's *Text, Lies, & Video Tape: Stories about Life, Literacy and Learning*. Our first respondent is a university teacher educator and researcher who positively reacts to Shannon's notions of critical literacy. Our second reviewer is an urban building principal who reacts more cautiously about Shannon's notions of civic activism and literacy.

–Editors

Answered Questions

Karen Bromley

Before beginning *Text, Lies, & Video Tape*, by Patrick Shannon (1995), I did what I always do with a book. I searched for tidbits of personal information about the author. Then I scanned the table of contents and examined references at the end. Many years of leisure and professional reading have instilled this ritual in me; I am never disappointed in what it yields both in personal connections to an author and in shaping my expectations and understanding of the reading.

From the title page, I learned that Patrick Shannon is forty-five years old and the Library of Congress considers the book to be about "social aspects of literacy" and "critical pedagogy." From the dedication, I discovered the regard he has for his mother. The cover "blurb" that mentions a ping pong ball and flying whales made me wonder about the book's connection to education. But, Shannon's background as an elementary school teacher and current position as professor at Penn State University and the Library of Congress's categories promised that it would. The Table of Contents yielded terms like "ownership," "control," and "critical literacy" in various chapter titles. These reminded me of his books (e.g., Shannon, 1990) and articles in *The Reading Teacher* (e.g., Shannon, 1993) as well as a recent article in *Language Arts* (Shannon, 1996) called "Mad as Hell." In it he views "standards" as part of a planned effort by American corporations to discredit public schools in order to reduce the costs of social services and thereby reduce corporate taxes. I hadn't agreed with this critical view of the standards movement and wondered if *Text, Lies & Video Tape* would be more of the same. Continuing my pre-reading ritual, I found the references in essay form at the back of the book where Shannon mentions the writers and books that have informed his thinking. This was a pleasant surprise and a further clue to the book's informal style.

As I read the book's Preface and seven chapters, I was intrigued with the stories Shannon tells from his experiences as student, teacher, and parent. They challenged me to think more broadly about literacy and learning. For example, in one chapter he discusses three pieces of his son's writing, reflecting on Tim-Pat's "ownership" and the importance and limits of ownership in learning. Shannon criticizes the popular and simplistic theory of individual ownership that he says causes us to misread what is happening in children's learning and "to miss opportunities to help children come to understand themselves, their histories and their cultures better" (p. 29). He argues that personal ownership involves the voices of social groups and the historical contexts from which people come. He maintains that "only through multiple ownership of our words and deeds can we develop intellectual autonomy" (p. 35) that will allow us to build a social morality that permits us to live together better. Shannon's analysis helped me broaden my notion of personal ownership and rethink voice, choice, control and authenticity in learning.

In another chapter, Shannon examines the opening of a Walmart store in State College, Pennsylvania and the historical, economic, and political realities involved. He says "78% of the jobs created... since the 1950's pay less than six dollars an hour," employ people less that 40 hours a week so employers escape paying benefits; this results in poverty level incomes for these families (p. 65). He believes today's schools only serve the children of professional classes and fail to prepare all children for the world in which they will live and work. He argues that schools must be reorganized to "promote students' civic participation in a multicultural democracy" (p. 73). Although he provides few tangible ideas for achieving this, many of Allington and Cunningham's (1996) suggestions come to mind. They discuss critical features of schools and suggest specific ways to rethink traditional school organization and management in terms of time, curriculum, assessment, parent involvement and professional development of teachers. In addition, Manning, Manning and Long (1992) give practical applications of Shannon's notion of a civic-minded curriculum. They describe interdisciplinary thematic teaching that emerges from the experiences and current needs of students who study self-generated topics which have relevance and authenticity for them.

Through the stories he tells, Shannon defines and describes a critical literacy perspective and critical literacy education. He provides some concrete ideas to the reader who is convinced that critical literacy education is important and who is in search of practical classroom applications. In one chapter he shows us how to deconstruct an "artifact of popular culture." In descriptions of interactions with his children and wife around the video/movie "Free Willy," he tells how they explored such issues as the environment, the economy, race, class, gender, greed, commodity advertising, gangs, poverty, and movie making. In these descriptions, he demonstrates for me how viewing a video or movie deeply and carefully can become the fuel for civic learning and activism.

Shannon's critical perspectives support Vygotskian (1978) and Deweyan (1916) theories that undergird an integrated social action cur-

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riculum. He is somewhat critical of the "naturalistic literacy program" at his daughter's school and advocates for critical literacy, a "liberating and activist" type of literacy that would give her a tool or mindset for understanding and change. Shannon blasts eclectic literacy programs that he says are amalgams of cultural, psychological, naturalistic, and critical perspectives because they appeal to our pragmatism and fail to prepare students for the world. But, literacy that is used for social activism and civic responsibility may well be along this path. I believe that a balanced literacy program is a viable way to the end that Shannon envisions. For many educators, change comes slowly and in incremental steps; the most far-reaching and powerful changes may begin with the small steps individual teachers make in changing their practice as they question what they and their schools are about.

Through Shannon's analysis of the stories he tells, he shows how high scores on national tests should be the least of our worries in preparing students to enter the world of work. His stories of "leadership, control of learning, civic life, and literacy" identify a more important responsibility: to prepare socially responsible citizens who will create "a present and future that will be more inclusive, more caring, and more just than our past (p. 2)." Shannon's provocative stories raise questions for me about critical literacy education and, at the same time, begin to show me how I need to help teachers, who are my students, study the world and make sense of it through dialogue and their own activism.

> Shannon's provocative stories raise questions for me about critical literacy education...

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Unanswered Questions

Gena Pappalardo Cone

As an urban principal I am confronted with many divergent kinds of problems, each one demanding a unique response and some of them defying all answers. In today's quickly moving world, the solutions that worked before, today might seem stale and even damaging. Therefore, practitioners need to assume a problem solving mode that moves beyond the solutions that seem to be "prescribed" for educators and come to an understanding of each situation within the context of their practice. This understanding of context allows teachers and principals to adjust their perspectives as they try to seek out a fresh solution, a clear understanding to the question: "What is really going on here?"

The question I raise about Patrick Shannon's book, *Text, Lies and Video Tape,* is simple: Is he enticing practitioners to engage in a reflective analysis of their practice or is he giving us another prescription to follow? I'd like to explore both of these possibilities from the point of view of an urban educator who has lived through Basal Readers, Mastery Learning, Back to Basics, Whole Language, New Math, and a whole lot of other protocols that prescribed the correct answer. (And sometimes we were told, the only answer!) As each one of these solutions are tried and proven to be inadequate for all, we are confronted with our lack of ability to respond to the problem at hand in a fresh, unique, and dynamic manner. We continue to apply remedies that have been proven ineffective: we hold on to romantic ideas about our own education and school experiences, and we generalize solutions that have worked for specific populations to have relevance for all students. In other words, we create a kind of stasis that intellectually condemns us to repeatedly address the same problems with the same solutions.

Shannon's work confronts this lack of reflection and asks readers to examine issues of practice from a critical, and at times, a political point of view. His assumptions about critical literacy and its relationship to learning are clearly attached to his political point of view about social class, gender, race and politics in America. For example, his stories about his children and their viewing of "Free Willy" as a text for developing critical awareness of the geopolitics of conservation, advertising, profit motives, and race express Shannon's political point of view. If he is espousing using this critical tool to encourage literacy, what would happen if the person facilitating this discussion, had a different point of view? That is, would this kind of analysis be "good" only if politically correct? Is Shannon espousing a process of developing critical awareness or is he advocating for his particular point of view? These are important questions because we live in a free society, one which is supposed to be a haven for divergent ideas and a protector of "differences." My point being, I believe that we have not engaged students in the development of their critical awareness, thus creating a kind of lack of thoughtfulness about issues and a lack of reason to become literate. But, I do not believe we have the option to define this awareness by proselytizing our own political perspectives. Public education should address the need for critical awareness while respecting the divergent opinions of students and families who are part of this community. Clearly, Shannon understands this: he removed his children from a school that he felt was not politically correct and enrolled them in a private school that more closely reflected his own political and educational philosophies. But what if he did not have the means to remove his children and had to depend upon the "public system" to educate his children. Would he have considered it beneficial to Laura and Tim-Pat, his children, if they engaged in a critical analysis of "Free Willy" in which the perspectives were in opposition to his own? Is Shannon advocating a process of critical awareness or a political point of view?

It is the right and maybe even the charge of parents to transmit to their children their own sense of values about what is important, what is right and wrong. As a parent, Shannon demonstrates the power of these convictions when we hear Laura asking politically profound questions that are the results of years of discussion and teaching on the part of both her mother and father. As a parent, I have consciously worked to transmit my values, the things I consider critical to my children. And I know I have been effective as a transmitter of this cultural literacy because of the literate lives my children are living today as adults. They are, in fact, a living legacy of my work as a transmitter, a teacher of what is important, important enough to build a life upon. As a teacher and principal, I have tried to develop a sense of critical awareness in my students, but I do not have the freedom to define their political perspectives for them. I believe that Shannon does not understand this difference. Maybe, he doesn't want to understand this, and that is his choice. Educators reading this book should be cautioned to understand Shannon's context and not interpret this work as a prescriptive tool for planning.

Is Shannon advocating a process of critical awareness or a political point of view?

The important issue I take from Shannon's work is the power of personal narrative as a form of research and how the lessons of practice become translated every day into lifelong learnings. There is much we can learn by observing and developing hypotheses based upon those observations. For instance, his analysis of Laura's experiences as a kindergarten student are insightful and raise important questions concerning the teacher's role in the development of literacy. But his initial analysis is not followed by more disciplined study that would try to make sense of Laura's experiences in other ways or even try to understand the perspective of the teacher. This story raises many questions for me: Is emergent literacy so fragile that the correction of a student's backhanded "L" could produce a negative effect upon the student's sense of self as a literate person? I would have liked Shannon to explore this based upon his initial response to a very real situation in his life. Drawing conclusions based upon one isolated story would be similar to developing a master plan using one piece of information as a guide. The use of multiple sources and fieldwork that seeks to understand a problem would enable Shannon to speak with more authority about emergent literacy and thereby help practitioners in schools to develop a conceptual framework for their practice.

Through the voices of Freire (1973), Lightfoot (1973), and others (e.g., Hamilton, 1995), we learn how to relate the personal, the story of our lives to learning. We learn how to become a critical consumer of the popular culture, able to analyze our current situations from various perspectives, unique to us and to our families. This is important work that must continue in schools. But it must be tempered by a deep respect for differences and the ability to respond to problems in the present. Dewey (1916) warned us about producing "cookie cutter" teachers, teachers who speak and act the same. We need to understand and transmit our uniqueness so that the classroom becomes a thoughtful, nurturing place where teachers and students can explore their ideas, thus developing the true foundation for literacy. For me, literacy is based upon critical thinking. People read because they want to know something, be it a baseball score, a magazine article, a novel, or a web page on the Internet. People want to know because they are curious. This "wanting to know" is the foundation for learning, and schools need to develop this in every way possible.

In the broadest sense, Shannon's work helps me to focus on this need and affirms my understanding of the importance of critical literacy. However, the lessons drawn from his personal experiences need to be examined in a more critical manner so that his assumptions are identified for the reader and clearly stated as such. Examples taken from his personal experiences with his children are not enough for me. I feel that Shannon's work lacks a discipline, and I would like to see him explore these ideas in a more rigorous, qualitative study.

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Constructing Bridges to Literacy Through Multiethnic Literature for Children

Violet H. Harada

ABSTRACT

Children's literature about and by people of color offers a valuable means of developing and enriching literacy in our schools. Current trends in multicultural literature indicate greater diversity in the characters, settings, and authors included in the literature used at the elementary and secondary levels. This article focuses on specific benefits of using this literature with children in the elementary grades. Stories representing the African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American cultures are highlighted in the discussion.

By the year 2020, statisticians predict that one of three children in school in the U.S. will come from a minority ethnic group. Such dramatic demographic changes reinforce the need to acknowledge different points of view in our schools and to thrive on this diversity in our classrooms. Within this multicultural context, literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It must be viewed in a broader and educationally more productive way as the ability to think, reason, and feel as literate individuals within a particular society (Langer, 1991). It involves helping children to interpret texts, tie them into personal experience, and compare and analyze what they know, think, and feel (Heath, Mangiola, & Schecter, 1991).

To promote literacy in our students, teachers must provide a range of opportunities for reading, writing, and reflecting about experiences that students of varied racial heritage find purposeful and relevant. They must use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts across content areas. Employing this approach not only helps young students personalize information and ideas, it also enables them to develop more enlightened interpretations of the events and beliefs that shape their world (Mathison & Young, 1995).

Multicultural Literature

The use of literature for teaching literacy is grounded in research and based on natural learning theory (Holdaway, 1979; Routman, 1988). This literature can take many forms including picture books for younger and older readers, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction informational books, and biographies (Routman, 1988).

The belief in the power of literature to shape our values have led to a broadening of the canon of children's literature. Multicultural literature, defined here as literature by and about people of color, can play an important role in improving literacy in our schools. Current trends indicate a greater diversity in the characters, settings, and authors included in literature used at the elementary and secondary levels (Applebee, 1991). These stories delineate character, setting, and theme, in part by detailing specifics of daily living that are recognizable to members of respective ethnic groups. They might include language styles and patterns, religious beliefs, musical preferences, family relationships, and social mores shared by the members of a cultural group (Bishop, 1993).

In the hands of a skilled writer, these details do not preclude other readers from understanding and appreciating the book; they add texture and increase the reader's appreciation for the many different designs for living that humans create. As children meet characters, who are from other cultures but who have emotions or experiences similar to their own, they begin to understand that, in spite of differences, people share a common humanity (Allen, 1993). In short, books by and about people of color are not only for new immigrant families or recent refugees (Kruse, 1992). As Yokota (1993) points out, reliable culturally conscious books are for all children:

> Students from non mainstream cultures can profit from having opportunities for understanding and developing pride in their heritage and for building a positive self-concept. In addition, for all students, multicultural literature provides vicarious experiences from cultures other than their own; and these experiences help them understand different backgrounds, thereby influencing their decisions about how they will live in this culturally pluralistic world (p. 156).

...reliable culturally conscious books are for all children...

Building Literacy Through Literature

Multicultural literature and literacy have a synergistic relationship that is student-centered and value-based. By using multicultural literature, teachers can engage students in activities that sharpen their reading, writing, and oral skills and positively shape their self-awareness and self-concept. Teachers build on what children already know about oral language, reading, and writing, by focusing on meaningful experiences rather than on isolated skill development. They respect the language that children bring to school and use it as a base for literacy activities. At the same time, they foster children's affective and cognitive development by providing opportunities to communicate what they know and feel (Glazer & Burke, 1994).

Teachers, who are aware of the potential of multicultural literature, also collaborate with their school library media specialists to plan book talks, read-aloud sessions, and joint lessons that motivate children to read (Koeller, 1996). They offer students a rich array of culturally diverse literature and have them think about what they read and write about what they think (Olson, 1996).

The remainder of this article focuses on specific benefits of using multicultural literature with children in the elementary grades. Examples of literature representing the African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American cultures are cited to demonstrate how literature supports the development of literacy. The children's books mentioned in the article also appear in a separate bibliography at the end.

1. Multicultural literature provides vicarious experiences and increases a spirit of inquiry. Good writing transports the reader to other places and other times. Well-done photo documentaries and picture books are particularly effective vehicles for capturing lively and authentic snapshots of children from different ethnic groups. In *Lion Dancer* (Waters & Slovenz-Low, 1990), youngsters share Ernie Wan's excitement as he prepares for a ceremonial lion dance in New York's Chinatown. They can compare Ernie's experience with that of young Timmy Roybal in *Pueblo Boy* (Keegan, 1991) as he participates in tribal ceremonial dances in New Mexico. In sharp contrast, *Working Cotton* (Williams, 1992) presents a poignant glimpse of California migrant workers through the eyes of a young African American girl. Teachers can build on these vicarious experiences by having students generate more questions about people from different racial minority groups and compare them with their own lifestyles. Students can also use these stories as models to create illustrated albums of their own lives. They may select a "day-in-the-life" approach or focus on a special family event. By writing and sharing their experiences, students construct their own knowledge from within and connect it with their reading. By doing this, they expand their affective as well as cognitive development.

2. Multicultural literature may also help the reluctant minority reader. Reluctant readers often become uncomfortable and anxious in situations in which they have the additional burden of interpreting different lifestyles and cultures and may reject the material. Myers (1989) contends that reading is easier for a child when 75% of the text is recognizable both in language and situation than when only 10% to 15% of the book is familiar. Tribus and Hedley (1992) also maintain that reluctant minority group readers need to see words from their national and language groups incorporated into the literature.

There are several striking examples of children's literature that provide text in multiple languages. In *Arctic Memories* (Ekoomiak, 1990), the author describes Inuit customs and traditions in English and Inuktitut. An accomplished artist, Ekoomiak also enhances his text with unique compositions created from felt applique and embroidery. Along similar lines, Dorros (1991) uses English interspersed with a liberal sprinkling of Spanish phrases to capture a young Hispanic American girl's imaginary flight over New York City in *Abuela*.

Children's Book Press is notable for its series of quality publications in bilingual text. For example, *Aekyung's Dream* (Paek, 1988), which is the story of a young Korean girl's struggle for acceptance by her white classmates, includes parallel texts in English and Korean. By using these types of resources, teachers can encourage children from bilingual families to write their own short stories in two languages. Entire classes can also compose a multilingual pictionary or dictionary to share with other children in the school.

3. Multicultural literature dispels stereotypes. Racial stereotypes are so deeply ingrained in American attitudes and daily life that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish fact from fantasy or to see members of racial minority groups as individuals. It is critical, therefore, to introduce youngsters to biographies, historical fiction, and picture book renditions of historical personalities that identify people who have defied racial barriers and shattered social myths. An example is Say's *El Chino* (1990) which highlights the life of Bill Wong, a Chinese American who became a famous Spanish matador. Raised by an immigrant father who believed that Americans could be whatever they wanted to be, Bill ignored the laughter of people who thought his dream impossible. This story illustrates the value and strength of individuality rather than unthinking conformity.

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Another example is Ringgold's *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* (1992), which is a tribute to the courage of Harriet Tubman who escorted over three hundred slaves to freedom and went on to become commander of intelligence operations in the Union Army during the Civil War. In this imaginative picture book, a young African American girl and her brother retrace the steps taken by slaves escaping to freedom on the Underground Railroad. As they experience the dangers and hardships of the fugitives, they also discover the strength and bravery of a remarkable woman.

Collective biographies also introduce students to men and women of color who have led unique lives. In *Black Heroes of the Wild West* (Pelz, 1990), there is hard-to-find information on African American explorers, pioneers, entrepreneurs, and cowboys who helped shape the West. Sinnott's *Extraordinary Hispanic Americans* (1991) spotlights the achievements of Latino Americans from the 1400s through the current day. *Famous Asian Americans* (Morey & Dunn, 1992) focuses on contemporary Asians ranging from teen tennis star Michael Chang to astronaut Ellison S. Onizuka.

Students can research various personalities and create front page articles, feature articles, and pictures for a class newspaper. This activity can serve as an exciting springboard for students to identify and write about people from various ethnic backgrounds in their own communities who are quietly breaking new ground.

4. Multicultural literature generates discussions about self-identity. Reading about young people who are searching fo their identities presents opportunities for students to also reflect on their own backgrounds and experiences. Novels such as *If It Hadn'* *Been for Yoon Jun* (Lee, 1993), *Racing the Sun* (Pitts, 1988), and *A Ja* *of Dreams* (Uchida, 1981) deal with the theme of youngsters from bicultural homes searching for their self-identities. In Pitts' novel, a young Navajo boy learns to appreciate his heritage when his grandfather comes to live with his middle-class suburban family. Alice hates her own "slanty eyes" in *If It Hadn't Been for Yoon Jun* and despises Yoon Jun, a lumpy new Korean immigrant who enters her school. Her gradual friendship with the timid boy, however, also leads her to accept her own Korean roots. Like Alice, Rinko in *A Jar of Dreams* desperately wants to fit in and be like everyone else in her all-white class. It takes her wise Aunt Waka visiting from Japan to teach Rinko the importance of her Japanese heritage and the value of her own strengths.

As students become involved in the lives of these fictional characters, they may keep journals to reflect on the motivation, emotions, and behavior of the main characters. Journal writing is also an excellent vehicle for young readers to express the reactions and feelings of other characters toward the protagonists. Importantly, teachers must guide students to reflect upon their personal experiences and beliefs that shape their individual responses. What they perceive and how they interpret their perceptions are critical in the learning process. At the same time, students' unedited writing will show how well they are organizing their thoughts and what conventions of print they are using.

5. Multicultural literature promotes positive self-images. Current research indicates that multicultural literature fosters cultural and personal pride within students and promotes cultural awareness and understanding among students from diverse backgrounds (Koeller, 1996; Nieto, 1992; Olson, 1996). Through literature, students discover children of other ethnic groups who achieve success. An example is the young heroine in *Amazing Grace* (Hoffman, 1991) who wants to play Peter Pan in the school play in spite of put downs by her classmates who claim she cannot do this because she is black and a girl. With loving support from her mother and grandmother, Grace wins the role and proves that a person can do anything if she sets her mind to it.

Real life also provides striking examples of young people of color who achieve their dreams. *A Boy Becomes a Man at Wounded Knee* (Wood, 1992) documents the struggle of an eight-year-old Lakota boy to complete a grueling 150-mile trek to Wounded Knee Creek. He joins his father and a group of Lakota men and women in undertaking this journey to commemorate the massacre of their Lakota ancestors at Wounded Knee one hundred years ago.

All students need opportunities to reflect on their own achievements. They may not be stars of their school plays or engage in history-making feats; however, all children have areas of strength that should be recognized and nurtured. In conjunction with their reading, students can create a wall mural or a Big Book to which they all contribute self-portraits of what they do best and the reasons for their success. Kohn (1994) indicates that children who explain their success in terms of how hard they tried "are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to keep working at something until they get it" (p. 281).

6. Multicultural literature also develops multiple perspectives on social issues and themes. Along with the invitation to look within themselves, literature challenges readers to examine the larger world. By its very organizing property, literature has the power to shape and give coherence to human experience. It may focus on one event or a specific period in time and enable readers to see new relationships. Importantly, multicultural literature provides unique points of view on issues and themes that cut across time and place.

Historical fiction, for example, can depict discrimination and prejudice from the vantage point of the oppressed. By providing this view, the literature offers special insights on racism that extend beyond the usual textbook documentation of events.

In *Morning Girl* (1992), Dorris presents life among the Arawak Natives before Columbus' arrival in the West Indies. Morning Girl and her brother are the narrators in alternating chapters of the story. As they share their lives, they reveal their tribe's complex culture and the warmth of strong family relationships. Dorris ends his narrative on an ironic note by juxtaposing an excerpt from Columbus' diary that reveals his ethnocentric view of the Arawak Natives as poor and inferior. The novel invites thoughtful discussion about how different ethnic groups perceive other cultures and how young readers themselves react to these perceived differences.

Textbooks usually give scant attention to the role of the Chinese in building the transcontinental railroad during the Civil War. In *Dragon's Gate* (1993), however, Yep offers an in-depth look at the slave-like conditions endured by the Chinese immigrants who helped chisel a path for the railroad through the dangerous Sierra Nevada. Through Otter, a young immigrant from the Kwangtung Province, readers experience the discriminatory and brutal working conditions suffered by the Chinese.

The prejudice against Asian Americans surfaces again in two picture books dealing with the internment of more than 110,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. *Baseball Saved Us* (Mochizuki, 1993) and *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1993) describe the psychological pain and physical loss suffered by thousands of Japanese American families who were imprisoned in desolate and cramped camps.

No less compelling is Taylor's *The Gold Cadillac* (1987) which portrays life in the South before the Civil Rights movement. In this short novel, an affluent African American family experiences discrimination first hand when they try to drive their brand new car from their home in Ohio to visit relatives in Mississippi. Taylor evokes a vivid sense of time and place as she reveals through a child's eyes the horror of institutional racism.

Finally, the grim violence of racism in contemporary society erupts in *Smoky Night* (Bunting, 1994). In this picture book for older readers, a frightened African American boy lives through a night of rioting and fires in a Los Angeles ghetto. Bunting tempers the story with a message of hope for trust and tolerance as the boy and his mother reach out to a Korean grocer who has lost her store.

By sharing stories that authentically capture our past and present, teachers can facilitate an exchange of points of view that contribute significantly to students' construction of knowledge. Students can write logs expressing their feelings about the literature. They can also imagine themselves as the protagonists in these stories and create diary accounts of their experiences. Through such literary encounters, discussions, and writing opportunities, children begin to realize that human beings are capable of hurting each other through ignorance. They also come to realize that such hurt can be avoided by respecting and valuing diversity.

7. Multicultural literature presents the universality of human experience. Ultimately, literature reflects not only the pluralistic nature of a dynamic society; it also helps children toward a fuller understanding of the common bonds of humanity. Younger

> ...Literature... helps children toward a fuller understanding of the common bonds of humanity.

children can enjoy the similarities among cultures through literature that deals with such topics as play and foods. Teachers can use Lankford's *Hopscotch Around the World* (1992) to share variations of this game from cultures around the world. A survey of the rituals of eating in *Bread, Bread, Bread* (Morris, 1989) can inspire an exploration of the regional and cultural differences associated with bread making and eating of this popular staple around the world.

For middle grade students, cross-cultural themes that deal with family relationships offer creative options for sharing personal family stories. *Dumpling Soup* (Rattigan, 1993) and *Bigmama's* (Crews, 1991) celebrate the universality of childhood and the warmth of close family ties. Although the former describes a multiracial family preparing for a New Year's feast in Hawaii and the latter focuses on an African American author's fond reminiscences of summers on a Florida farm, both works eloquently communicate the importance of families working and laughing together.

Older elementary youngsters might tackle more sophisticated themes such as death and peace. *First Snow* (Coutant, 1974) and *A Gift for Tia Rosa* (Taha, 1986) are sensitive accounts of young characters coming to terms with the deaths of loved ones. The first is a gentle story of a young Vietnamese American girl who learns from her ailing grandmother that death involves changing forms and living on in some way. The second is an equally moving portrayal of a little Hispanic American girl and her special friendship with an elderly neighbor. When the old woman dies, the girl realizes that her memories of Tia Rosa will keep memories of her neighbor forever fresh and close to her. These simply told stories can form the basis for thoughtful discussions about how different cultures believe that the strength of relationships between young and old can transcend the notion of death as something abrupt and final.

Ultimately, literature can carry a message that cuts across racial boundaries and aims for a global peace. *Peace Crane* (Hamanaka, 1995) is a recent work that aspires toward this goal. The author was inspired to write this poem after reading about Sadako, a young Japanese survivor of the Hiroshima bombing who folded paper cranes as symbols of peace. In this lyrical piece, a young African American girl in America dreams of a world without borders and without guns in which all children can grow up loving and being loved. A natural extension to such literature would be to have children create their own messages of hope for their world. They could present their imaginative expressions in the form of songs, poems, letters, and even illustrated quilts.

Conclusion

According to Koeller (1996) literature and literacy connections can "...help students recognize their own interests and understand why readers and writers play a crucial role in democracies" (p. 102). Literature enables young readers to live many lives and inspires them to think critically about the human problems it exposes. Multicultural works that are authentic and accurate assure children of color that they also come from traditions that give them roots and have futures that offer them promise. Such literature provides an excellent vehicle for developing and enriching lifelong literacy.

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The Language and Literacy Spectrum Volume 7 ■ Spring 1997

Something Old, Something New: Children's Literature Favorites

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a compilation of reviews of books that have captured the hearts of generations past and those books that have been newly published with the potential to become favorites of future generations.

As the future beckons with its technological changes to the way readers interact with text, the Children's Literature Committee has taken both a step backward and a step forward to share reviews of books that have withstood the test of time and those that have recently been published and may be the classics of the next century. The books reviewed in this article include the themes of Children Seeing Themselves in Books and Discovering the World and Its Peoples.

Children Seeing Themselves in Books

Stories provide children with friends, soulmates, confidantes – characters who provide vicarious experiences that mirror real life. Through these stories, young readers can find characters who are confronting similar problems to those that real children face. The solutions that these fictional characters find encourage young readers to think of themselves as having the potential for making a difference.

A classic problem-solver is ***Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*** created by Mem Fox, illustrated by Julie Vivas (Kane Miller, 1985). Wilfred lives next door to a nursing home and befriends many of the residents, particularly 96-year-old Miss Nancy. When he hears his parents bemoaning Miss Nancy's loss of memory, Wilfred interviews many of the home's residents in order to find out what is a memory. His discoveries help Miss Nancy reawake the warmth of memories.

Someone not so good at problem-solving, but still quite lovable is Alexander of ***Alexander who Used to be Rich Last Sunday*** by Judith Viorst (Macmillan, 1978). Alexander's grandparents visit him on Sunday and give him and each of his brothers a dollar bill. Alexander is determined to save his money for a walkie-talkie, but as the week progresses, he squanders his fortune away as he is lured by bubble gum, a couple of bets, a snake rental, etc. By week's end, Alexander has what he began with – bus tokens. Better luck next time to Alexander who can also be seen in ***Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*** (Athenium,1972).

Some newer books that present children as problem-solvers are ***Rose Blanche***, ***Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair***, and ***The Legend of the Windigo***. ***Rose Blanche***, originally published in 1985, reissued in 1996, was written by Christopher Gallaz, illustrated by Roberto Innocenti (Harcourt, Brace and Company). In a small German town during World War II, the narrator, a young girl named Rose Blanche recounts the occupation of her town by the Nazis. At first the soldiers are welcome, but gradually the excitement fades and reality emerges. Rose Blanche happens upon a barbed wire fence, a concentration camp's enclosure. She makes a fateful decision – to help those starving behind the fence. The story's exquisite illustrations, though colorful and richly detailed, reflect the starkness of the time. The ending continues to haunt the reader long after the book is closed.

On a lighter note, ***Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair*** (Philomel, 1996), shows how children change the lifestyle of an entire town. The book written by master storyteller, Patricia Polacco, describes a town in which books are not permitted. Years before Eli, the main character, was born, the town had decided to demolish the town library so that a powerful TV antenna could be erected. Since then, TV preoccupies everyone's life except Aunt Chip's. With the help of Aunt Chip, Eli learns to read and brings the joy of reading to his friends and to the rest of the town. This book is a great read aloud and provides many springboards for discussion on the importance of books and the multitude of activities that take children away from reading.

The ***Legend of the Windigo*** by Gayle Ross, paintings by Murv Jacob (Dial Books, 1996), centers around Native American culture and traditions. The Windigo is an evil Golem-like creature made of stone; once it descends on a tribe, the village is never without tragic events. In one such tribe, the elders meet to try to solve the problem. The grandson of one of the elders comes up with the solution to rid the village of the Windigo. The ending will surprise readers and will forever change one's view of mosquitoes.

Relationships, so important to children, form the main ingredient in many children's books. Siblings are the focus

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for two books: ***My Brother, Ant*** by Betsy Byars, illustrated by Marc Simont (Viking, 1996) and ***A Sister's Wish*** by Kate Jacobs, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter (Hyperion, 1996). Byars' book is written for young children and makes a good read aloud. This lively, fast-paced text is a delightful tale of the joys of having a younger sibling. With realistic dialogue, it also addresses in a comical, but sensitive way, the fear of darkness and monsters. In ***A Sister's Wish***, Jacobs explores what it is like to have too many brothers (a half brother, a whole brother and a step brother). All that the little girl in this tale wants is a sister with whom to share a book, a secret, and a quiet place, whereas her brothers just want football, fishing, and roughhouse. The author writes as the narrator, observing the many brothers and lonesome sister. She never discloses the names of the siblings, which makes it easier for the child-reader to self-project into the various roles. Nancy Carpenter's pastels set a warm mood for the story of very few words.

Another focus of relationships in children's literature is how family members react to crisis. In ***Remembering Mog*** by Colby Rodowsky (Farrar & Straus, 1996), a secondary student remembers her sister, Mog, who was murdered two years before her high school graduation. The book gives an excellent account of the ways in which each family member deals, or fails to deal with the murder. In learning to cope without her sister, Annie tries to forget the actual incident of her death yet fears that she will not be able to remember Mog as time passes. The realism of this book may help young adults in a similar situation gain a better perspective on the grieving process.

Zero at the Bone by Michael Cadnum (Viking, 1996) is the story of a family in crisis. Told from the perspective of Cray, a high school senior, the book details the family's struggles with the disappearance of one of the children. Anita, a recent high school graduate, leaves her job after work one night and vanishes. We are given a detailed view of the family members' range of reactions from shock to disbelief, to anger, to a grudging acceptance of the fact that the police may never solve the mystery. We see the transformation of each person as they try to pick up the pieces and go on with some semblance of life as it was before the disappearance.

More classic books in which children see themselves are for older readers such as ***The Cay*** by Theodore Taylor (Doubleday, 1969) and ***Harriet the Spy*** by Louise Fitzhugh (Harper, 1964). Though too young to be a classic as yet, ***The House on Mango Street*** by Sandra Cisneros (Arte Publico, 1988) provides much enjoyment in its essay format. For younger readers, more books reflective of their lives are ***Boundless Grace*** by Mary Hoffman (Dial, 1995), illustrated by Caroline Binch and ***The War with Grandpa*** by Robert Kimmel Smith (Delacourt, 1984).

Discovering the World and Its Peoples

There is so much to appreciate in the study of the past and the diversity of countries and cultures of the world that it is important to introduce children to books that develop not only factual knowledge, but also engender respect for others, their way of life, and their past. ***Tapenum's Day*** by Kate Waters, photographs by Russ Kendall (Scholastic, 1996) is an account of a Wampanoag native boy's day in Pilgrim times. This is the third volume in a series depicting life in Plymouth Plantation in the 1620s. Like the other two books, ***Sara Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl*** (Scholastic, 1989) and ***Samuel Eaton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Boy*** (Scholastic, 1989), ***Tapenum's Day*** is largely told through vivid photographs re-enacting daily activities such as dressing, eating and hunting. Tapenum dreams of being chosen to become a *Pniese*, a special kind of warrior counselor. This portrayal of Tapenum's day will give readers a clear and accurate picture of what life was like for a young Wampanoag boy. Also, the book is a valuable resource for Native American study. A related book is the recently published ***On the Mayflower*** by Kate Waters, photographs by Russ Kendall (Scholastic, 1996) which tells of the Mayflower crossing through the eyes of two children, one of whom is part of the crew.

...It is important to introduce children to books that... engender respect for others...

More books that honor the past are ***Lyddie*** by Katherine Paterson (Viking Penguin, 1991) and ***The Bobbin Girl*** written and illustrated by Emily Arnold McCully (Dial Penguin, 1996). Both books take place in Lowell, Massachusetts during the Industrial Revolution. The stories center around the textile mills and the young women and children who worked there. Lyddie Worthen, a young adolescent, becomes a mill worker to earn money to reunite her family. While working at the mill, Lyddie meets determined young women. Some women paste pages of books on the mill house windows so that they can improve their minds while working the machinery. The book learning may be their key to escaping the rigid existence for a chance at going to college. Others, who chafe at the control the mill owners have on their lives, want to form unions. In spite of dangers to health, the young women work to make a better life.

The Bobbin Girl is Rebecca Putney. She experiences similar circumstances to Lyddie's; although she is only ten years old, she works from 5:30 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. Many of the workers in the boarding house run by her mother decide to turnout, and Rebecca joins them in one of the first job actions in the country. Both ***Lyddie*** (for older readers) and ***The Bobbin Girl*** (for younger readers) describe the growing pains of a country and how young women persevered to make a place for themselves in the face of hardships.

Another book taking place in an important historical time is ***Across Five Aprils*** by Irene Hunt (Follett, 1964). This book is a Civil War story that follows one family in its struggles to survive and remain together. The effect of the war on families is realistically depicted.

A newer book which also takes place in the late 1800s is ***An Alcott Family Christmas*** written and illustrated by Alexandra Wallner (Holiday House, 1996). This book shows a fictional portrayal of the life of beloved writer, Louisa May Alcott. As the story begins, the Alcotts are facing Christmas with no money. Louisa writes a play for her sisters and her to perform as a gift to their parents. Getting ready to perform and preparing the feast is anticipated with excitement.

However, just as the family is about to sit down to the feast, a neighbor comes seeking help for his sick wife and baby. The Alcott family shares and as they finally prepare to partake of their meal, a feeling of warmth of family surrounds them. In spite of disappointments, their regard for each other as well as their neighbors and their cheerfulness make this a heartwarming story.

So Dear to My Heart by Sterling North (Dutton,1947) is a slice-of-life story about a young boy living on a small rural, midwestern farm with his grandmother at the turn of the twentieth century. It details the problems Jeremiah must face in trying to keep his scallywag black lamb from being sold by his strict grandmother.

A fictional biography of Booker T. Washington also demonstrates resolve in the face of obstacles. ***More Than Anything Else*** by Marie Bradby, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet (Orchard Books, 1995), depicts the series of events that led to Booker learning how to read. Through the efforts of his mother who gave him a book and of a stranger, who teaches him, Booker beams with pride as he learns to read his name. This book not only gives a positive message about reading, but it also makes children anxious to learn more about Booker T. Washington and others who had to search for the chance to become literate. For older readers, ***Nightjohn*** by Gary Paulsen (Delacourt, 1993), is another book that shows how difficult, if not life-threatening, becoming literate was in the past.

A contemporary book about people and their way of life today are ***Famous Hispanic Americans*** by Janet Normura Morley and Wendy Dunn (Cobblehill Books, 1996), which details the lives of famous Hispanic Americans who have achieved in the arts, government, sports, medicine and business. Each of the biographies, enhanced by photographs, includes information on the early lives of the subjects.

Wilma Unlimited (How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman) by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by David Diaz (Harcourt, Brace Company, 1996) is an artistic triumph. The illustrations, the incredible story of courage and success, and even the print type, fit together to create a moving experience. Simply and forthrightly told, the story tells of a sickly baby, who born into a family of nineteen children, contracts polio in her youth. In spite of this disease, Wilma never gives up and eventually wins three Olympic gold medals. More importantly, she uses her fame to found the Wilma Rudolph Foundation to help others learn about opportunity and to cultivate their own athletic abilities. She is a role model for today's youth. This is a must for any biography collection.

Dancing Rainbows: A Pueblo Boy's Story written and illustrated by Evelyn Clarke Mott (Cobblehill-Penguin, 1996) tells of a Pueblo Indian living in New Mexico. Beautiful photography captures Andy and his family as they prepare for their Feast Day, which includes a performance by the Tewa Dance Group, formed by Andy. The group travels around the world to share and teach their dances. The reader learns of Andy's culture and how he strives to keep it alive.

Along with preventing cultures from disappearing, there is concern for the disappearance of animals such as the African elephant. In ***A Most Dangerous Journey – The Life of an African Elephant*** by Roger A. Caras (Dial, 1995), the author masterfully writes about one elephant's plight. The text reads like a novel and reflects the knowledge and expertise of its author who was formerly an environmental reporter for ABC-TV. Each chapter describes the milestones in the life of the elephant, Ndovu. As the story line continues, the reader is introduced to hundreds of other African equatorial animals, is shown the natural interplay for survival, and witnesses the impact of human's on the habitat. The author asks the reader to consider not only the fate of the elephant, but the impact of people's actions on the environment and society.

The Children's Literature Committee could have written reams of pages about the exceptional books that exist today and about those which have given us much joy in the past. This article has described just a few of the offerings available in what promises to be a glowing future for readers of children's literature.

HOT LUNCH
BAG LUNCH

Surrounded by books, Scott Kellerhouse and Kyle Cruzen select some to read.

Photograph courtesy of Sue Clarke and Debby Wiede, Taconic Hills School District.

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